SHORT STORIES

No. 771.] Week ending October 10, 1903. [Price One Penny.

Reflected in the glass, I saw the door of my room open. A man entered with a stealthy, cat-like tread—in his hand a pistol, cocked and loaded.

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "The Mystery of Enid Bouce." See inside.)

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SHORT STORIES

No. 771.] Week Ending October 10th, 1903. [One Penny

The Mystery of Enid Boyce.

A Tale of a Lost Father.

Containing the Incident Depicted on the Cover.

I SUPPOSE there never was a girl more lonely than I was on the day when I stood before the altar, and took Fabian Chambers as my husband, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, till death should part us!

I was an orphan, with, as far as I knew, not a single relation in the whole, wide world, and although Fabian's family had been civil to me as his promised wife, their civility was of a distant and formal kind. They did not take me into their hearts or lives; they never allowed me to feel one of themselves; I was outside the charmed circle inside which dwelt all the Chambers clan!

Perhaps their attitude of mind was not surprising, when it is remembered that Fabian met me (picked me up—his mother said, I believe) at the house of some people to whose child I was governess; when it is further recollected that my whole worldly wealth consisted of twenty pounds a year left me by my mother, and when it has still further to be told that I was able to tell Mrs. Chambers nothing whatever about my family or belongings—good, bad, or indifferent. To all my future mother-in-law's probing questions I could only give the same answer:

"I do not know," and it was literally true. I knew that my name was Enid Boyce; I knew that I had lived with my mother in the pokiest, dreariest of lodgings until her death, and that she had saved and scraped and pinched—first to give me a decent education, then to leave me a tiny sum that I might not be utterly penniless. About my father I could give no information whatever. My mother never spoke of him. She merely told me that I had lost him when I was a baby, and that he had left her in terribly straitened circumstances. I had often thought it odd that we seemed to possess no portrait of him; but after my mother's death I found amongst her papers, a miniature which bore underneath it the words "Robert Boyce"—my father's name; and this I treasured greatly, marvelling much that my mother had spoken so little of the singularly handsome man whose gay, reckless eyes met mine out of the picture, making up my mind finally that her great love, and her great grief, rendered speech about her lost husband impossible, even to me—their child.

Before I married Fabian, Mr. and Mrs. Chambers made, I believe, every possible effort to discover some particulars about my family—but their efforts were unavailing, and as Fabian loved me for myself, and not for my family, he insisted upon marrying me in face of the stern disapproval of his own people.

Thus it came about, as I say, that I was a very, very lonely girl on my wedding day; married from lodgings, dressed by a sympathetic landlady, and given away by the doctor who had attended my mother, and who was kind and friendly, though he only became our friend during my mother's last illness.

It had been arranged that we should drive straight from the church to the station, whither I had dispatched my modest luggage on the previous day; and my new relations saw us off from the church steps, their frigid courtesies striking a chill to my heart, after the emotion and strain of the great service in which I had just taken part.

Mr. Chambers made one or two commonplace remarks to me, whilst his wife drew Fabian aside to bid him farewell. Were my ears more quickened than usual that day, or did she purposely raise her voice? I only know that I heard her say, in tones pregnant with meaning:

"Remember, Fabian, what's bred in the bone comes out in the flesh. You have given no heed to our warning, you have taken your own way, but I insist on speaking now."

I fancy Fabian tried to stay her flow of eloquence, but she continued without heeding his protest:

"You have married a girl of whom we know nothing, less than nothing, except that she is pretty! She is your wife now; I will say nothing against her, I intend to be civil to her, but—remember—we are in utter ignorance of her antecedents, and they may be of the very worst. I only advise you, Fabian, to watch over her carefully, to check evil tendencies,

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and to guard her from all associates who can harm her. She is young and easily moulded. I warn——"

"Thank you, mother," Fabian's voice at last managed to interrupt her torrent of words, "I am perfectly satisfied with Enid—*as she is*, I don't care a straw about her parents; I beg that in future you will remember you are speaking of my wife, when you mention her name."

At that, he came down the steps that separated us, drew my hand under his arm, said softly:

"Come, my darling," and led me away to the carriage, amongst whose cushions I sank back, stifling a choking sob.

"I will try to make you a good wife," I gasped out, when he drew me into his arms, heedless of gaping passers-by, "I wish I could tell you all about my father—my mother was the dearest, sweetest soul on earth! My father died so long ago—surely——"

I broke off with a sob, and Fabian soothed me tenderly, murmuring some remarks about his own mother which were neither filial nor complimentary.

"Never mind, my sweet," he went on presently. "I am entirely independent of my people—as you know—thanks to my dear old godfather. You and I will be as happy as the day is long in our country home—and by and bye my people will understand that my wife's beautiful face is only an index to her beautiful soul!"

In this way my husband comforted me, and surely never was there so blissful a honeymoon as the one we spent in dawdling through Switzerland and Italy, coming back in the early autumn to Fabian's lovely house in Surrey, left to him by an old godfather, with a sum of money which, to my unsophisticated ears, sounded like the fortune of a millionaire.

I had never in my life known such luxury as Fabian loved to heap upon me. The lodgings of my childhood, the uncomfortable rooms of my governess life made me appreciate the charm and comfort of the exquisitely furnished and appointed house of which I was now mistress.

Whilst as for the garden! I—a cockney born and bred—simply revelled in the garden, and in the gorgeous expanse of moorland surrounding it. We were in a somewhat lonely neighbourhood, the next house to ours being a mile or so away, and surrounded by its own park, and the village was two miles distant. But I loved the loneliness, the peace, the restful silence of the country, and Fabian and I were blissfully happy with our books and music indoors; our walks and drives; our gardening and sketching without. We had a certain amount of gaiety as well. Fabian, rich and attractive, was popular in the country-side, and we were invited to many dinner parties and receptions which I enjoyed with all the zest of youth, and with the knowledge that I was fair to see and pleasant to talk to!

Fabian loaded me with gifts; my toilettes were admired, and, I think, envied by the ladies of the neighbourhood, whose husbands were less generous than mine, and my jewels were talked of with awe, and were indeed superb. Fabian had a most ingenious safe built into the wall of his dressing-room for them, lest, as he said, "the wily burglar" should hear of their fame and come to look for them!

One evening in early November, a few months after our wedding, we had been dining at the house of our nearest neighbours—the Lynn Davis's—and as I was tired I had come home early, leaving my husband to enjoy a game of billiards with our host. I went straight to my bedroom, and having taken off my satin gown, dismissed my maid, whose eyes showed that she was worn out, and began to prepare myself for bed.

My jewels I always put away myself, for by Fabian's express wish, not a soul in the establishment (excepting our two selves) knew of the existence of the safe in his dressing-room, and until my maid had left me I always laid my rings and other trinkets in a casket on my dressing-table—conveying them to their permanent quarters when I was alone.

On this night I proceeded leisurely to unclasp my pearl necklace and lay it in the casket, where I had already placed the magnificent rings, which were Fabian's latest gift, and then lifted my hand to draw from my hair the sparkling diamond combs which shone like stars against my dark tresses.

As I stood thus, my hand uplifted, my lips idly humming the latest waltz tune, my eyes absently fixed on my own reflection in the glass before me, I suddenly saw a sight which so paralysed me with horror, that I remained motionless, transfixed—my hand still clutching the comb in my hair, my face growing white and terror-stricken before my very eyes.

Reflected over my shoulder in the glass, I saw the door of my room—which was behind me, slowly, slowly open. I saw a form enter with a cat-like, stealthy tread, which was in itself unutterably terrifying, and finally I saw the dim form resolve itself into that of a tall man in evening dress, holding in his hand a fully-loaded pistol, which was directed towards the back of my head.

"Utter a single sound and I fire," said a low voice, which was a perfectly superfluous command, for I could no more have spoken than I could have flown out of my barred and shuttered window, so frozen was I with deadly fear.

I simply stood where I was, watching with fascinated stare, whilst the intruder shut and locked my door behind him, and then crept across the room towards me, his hateful little pistol always pointing straight at me. His face was as sinister and evil a one as I have ever seen, the face of a man between fifty and sixty, who has lived a wicked and a hard life, but the face nevertheless of a gentleman! And he was clad in irreproachable evening dress.

All this I took in as he advanced towards me, but when he had come close to me, when he was able to catch his first glimpse of my white, terrified face in the glass, of my wide, frightened eyes and quivering lips, a most extraordinary change passed over his own countenance. The pistol he held dropped from hands grown suddenly nerveless, an awful terror looked out of his deeply sunken eyes, his lined cheeks grew ashen white, his jaw dropped, his lips fell apart in a perfectly ghastly fashion. All at once he stretched out two feeble, shaking arms towards me, crying out in the voice of an old, old man:

"Enid—my wife—my wife!" and sank a crumpled, huddled heap at my feet.

Dazed, terrified, bewildered, I shrank away from his unconscious form, my eyes gazing at him with a horror and amazement too deep for words, when a step behind me made me start violently round, to find myself face to face with my husband, who had entered by the dressing-room door.

His face was set and stern, as I had never before seen it; his mouth was closed firmly in a straight, severe line; his

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eyes looked at me hardly and coldly, as though I had committed some crime.

"Fabian, oh, Fabian!" I cried pitifully, tottering towards him. "I have been so frightened—help me—that man——"

"That man, your *husband!*" was Fabian's amazing answer, as he drew himself away from the touch of my clinging hands. "I happen to have heard his remark before he fell at your feet. 'Enid—my wife—my wife!' So this was the reason of your great fatigue at the Lynn Davis's—this was why——"

"Fabian! Fabian!" I almost screamed, aghast at the awful things he was saying, at the terrible fabric he was building up out of what seemed to me such slight materials.

"What are you saying, dear? I am so frightened!" And again I shuddered nearer to him. "This man came in and threatened to shoot me; then he suddenly called out—what—what you heard, and fell—like that." I glanced at the inanimate form, and shivered from head to foot.

"Why did *your husband* wish to shoot you?" Fabian asked, with hideous emphasis on those two words.

"He is not my husband," I cried. "I never saw him in my life, I do not know who he is. I thought he came to rob me—I never saw him in my life."

My voice faltered under my husband's stern, searching gaze, he mistook the reason of its trembling.

"Your own shaking voice betrays you," he said shortly, "we will not discuss the question now. That man must be attended to." And, paying not the slightest further attention to me, Fabian dragged the unconscious stranger on to a couch at the foot of the bed, and proceeded to try to restore him to a sense of his surroundings. After what seemed to me an interminable time, a sort of long shiver ran through the man's frame, and he opened his eyes. They fell first on me, standing at the foot of the couch, and with a gesture either of fear or repulsion, he half-raised himself on his elbow, and waved his hand wildly towards me, saying in a thick, husky voice:

"Enid—my wife! Do not—do not ——"

Then, with a horrible rolling of his eyes, and a dreadful contortion of his face, he sank back amongst the cushions again, in total unconsciousness.

How the weary hours of that night dragged by I do not know. They seemed as though they would never end, as I sat in my dressing-gown, watching Fabian's efforts to revive the stranger, forced to listen to the stern, cold words he now and again spoke to me, carrying out the short commands he occasionally gave me.

The unconscious man roused up more than once, but only to babble deliriously and unintelligibly, and when morning dawned Fabian sent one of the grooms to summon the nearest doctor, and, meanwhile, transferred the stranger to the bed in his dressing-room.

"For the sake of your reputation and my name," he said to me, "I shall tell everyone that this man is a relation of yours, whom I brought back with me from the Davis' last night; and that he fell ill after we reached here. You still decline to tell me his name?" and Fabian's eyes, cold and stern, scrutinised my face searchingly.

"I do not know his name," I said. "Fabian—believe me—please believe me, I never saw the man till he broke into my room last night. I have never deceived you—never, never!"

He laughed, a sarcastic laugh. "My mother was a wise woman," he answered. "She gave me a warning. I disregarded it. I *trusted* you." (Oh, the biting scorn he threw into that word). "You have given me the reward I doubtless deserved. When your husband is able to speak, no doubt *he* will be more ready to speak and tell the truth than you are. I wish to have nothing more to do with you. Your place is by his side."

I think my heart broke when Fabian spoke those words, but I only looked at him gravely and sadly, and replied:

"God grant that some day you may know how grossly you have misjudged me—your faithful and loyal wife"—and then I left the room, seeing that argument and explanation were useless.

All that day I wandered about the house and grounds too miserable to do anything, refusing my meals, and fleeing whenever I caught sight of Fabian. I felt that I could not bear further reproaches and scorn, they hurt me to my very soul's core. From my maid I heard that the sick man upstairs had not recovered full consciousness, and I think she wondered why I did not take my place by his side, seeing that according to Fabian's story, he was a relative of my own. But I feebly explained to her that the sight of his unconscious form upset me most terribly, and she accepted my statement with the stolidity of a well-trained servant.

My husband I successfully avoided throughout the day. The doctor came and went and returned again, bringing with him a trained nurse, but evening had fallen before I again saw the stranger who had wrought such havoc in my life.

Fabian found me at eight o'clock sitting listlessly in my boudoir, and said sharply:

"Come upstairs and see your husband, he is asking for you." Lacking the spirit to contradict him, I rose wearily and followed him to his dressing-room, wondering whether I could really be the same woman, whose cup of joy had yesterday overflowed its brim, who had been so full of irresponsible girlish gaiety.

Fabian preceded me into the darkened room, then drew back and allowed me to approach the bed.

The man who lay upon it, his eyes turned towards me, shrank away into the furthest corner when he saw me, then his hands went out to me with a supplicating gesture, very pathetic to behold.

"My wife," he whispered, "I thought—I thought——Forgive me now, let bygones be bygones—I——"

His voice died away, his strength seemed insufficient for the effort he had made—his face grew so ghastly, that the nurse who stood by his side put a glass to his lips, and said gently:

"He must not be excited."

"You had better stay here," Fabian said in a hoarse undertone. "This is your place."

"Is he—dying?" I asked, in an equally low voice, my eyes going back involuntarily to the figure on the bed.

"No, he is not," Fabian answered grimly. "Do not buoy yourself up with *that* hope. He has had a stroke, but the doctor says there is no reason why he should not soon be well again. Death will not release you."

The cruel, cutting words, penetrated my brain and heart. I was worn out, exhausted by hunger, fatigue, and the long strain of misery, and without a word of reply, I lifted appealing

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eyes to Fabian's hard, unresponsive face, and then slipped at his feet in a dead faint.

I do not know how long that faint lasted. For hours and hours I seemed to be groping about in impenetrable black darkness, where was no life, nor human voice, nor cheering sound.

Then gradually, very gradually, a far-away light struck upon the blackness, and a confused sound like that of rushing waters, came to my ears—a sound that presently resolved itself into voices speaking softly.

"She is coming round, but it is plain she has had some great shock." It was the doctor's voice. Fabian replied. "She has had a great shock," he said, and I dimly recognised some anxiety in the tones. "Is she recovering, doctor?"

"Hush, yes. You are feeling better, Mrs. Chambers?" I opened my eyes and met the doctor's kindly glance.

"Yes," I said, my voice sounding far-away, "but—tell my husband I——"

I wanted to tell Fabian all that was in my heart, but no more words would come, and I heard a low exclamation break from his lips, as he muttered, so that only I could hear:

"She has owned it. He *is* her husband."

Those words gave me strength. With a tremendous effort I raised myself, and put out my hands to Fabian.

"He is not—he is not," I cried, greatly to the doctor's stupefaction. "I never saw him before, never—never." And, with that, my hardly worn strength gave out again, and I sank back into the darkness.

For many days after those two long fainting fits I was genuinely ill, and as I heard afterwards, the doctor sternly forbade all reference before me to the stranger who still lay in Fabian's dressing-room.

My maid nursed me, and Fabian came to see me at stated intervals. He was kinder now, I think because the doctor had insisted upon it—but he was kind as an acquaintance might have been, not as a husband.

And as I slowly crept back to health, the bitterness of all that had caused my illness sank deeper into my heart. The iron entered my soul.

When I was pronounced really well again, Fabian came into my boudoir one afternoon, and, standing before the fireplace, whilst I sat back in an arm-chair, said quietly:

"This state of things cannot go on, Enid. Do you still refuse to own that the man who came to you on that fatal night is your husband?"

"I entirely refuse to own it," I said firmly. "I never saw him before—he came for my jewels, I am sure of it. Why, otherwise, did he level a pistol at me?"

"It is not a pleasant thing for a man to find his wife has married someone else. He probably intended to kill you when he was struck down by illness. Enid—for Heaven's sake own the truth! In any case you cannot remain here; you are not my wife; you must leave this house; must leave me and return to your own husband; but I beseech you—*own* the truth."

I grasped the arms of my chair, and looked at him blankly.

Leave him? Leave the man I loved—the home in which I had been so happy? Go away from Fabian—my husband? Oh, impossible—impossible!

"I have spoken the truth," I said, rising to my feet, and advancing towards Fabian with outstretched hands. "Indeed, indeed, you need not drive me away. I am your own true wife. I am not the wife of that man. I——"

A low exclamation at the door startled us both, and we turned quickly to see, standing there, the very person of whom we spoke. He still looked very ill, but his eyes had in them a clearer expression than I had seen before. They were fixed strangely on me, and I left Fabian's side and went slowly towards the other man.

"I am not your wife," I said firmly. "Look at me well; you have made a mistake. I am not your wife."

The man drew his hand across his eyes with a bewildered gesture, then looked at me again; his hand grasped mine suddenly, his eyes left my face and fixed themselves on a miniature hanging before him on the wall.

"Who is that?" he cried. "Can you deny that it is my portrait?"

"Your portrait?" I exclaimed, too bewildered to take in the full significance of his words. "Oh, no, it cannot be yours. That is my father, Robert Boyce."

There was dead silence for a moment, then he said slowly, his hand still grasping mine:

"You are the living image of your mother. I thought you were her, I thought—thought you were Enid—my wife. But I—child—I am your father—your father." And, as he uttered the words, his voice broke—I saw that his eyes were full of tears.

It was all true! The man who had come to rob me was my father, who had not died in my childhood, but who had passed from one evil course to another, until he had sunk to being a gentleman-burglar. It was his custom to do his burglaries in evening-dress as rousing less suspicion should he come across a stray servant.

Having heard rumours of Mrs. Fabian Chambers' jewels, he had watched the house—seen me come in alone—opened the front door with a skeleton key (it had been left unbolted for Fabian) and stole upstairs.

Then the sight of my face in the glass had made him think he was in the presence of his wife—for he said I exactly resembled what she had been when he deserted her, and the awful shock had prostrated him at my feet.

Fabian has never been able to do enough to make up to me for his want of trust—and he is goodness itself. My father, who, broken down and aged, lives with us, is devoted to his grand-children—Fabian and Enid. My girl bears her mother's and grandmother's name—may, she never endure the agony I endured at hearing those words: "Enid—my wife!"

L. G. Moberly.

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Daisy and the Curate.

Telling of a Petulant Girl and a Strong-Minded Young Clergyman.

"I WONDER if this one will fall in love with you."

"Harry, don't be so horrid!"

"But you know very well they all do. I am sure I don't know why,"—with brotherly candour.

"I know, and it's very disagreeable!" said Daisy.

"You don't seem to think so at the time."

"The disagreeability comes when—when they propose," said Daisy ruefully. She jumped up from her seat suddenly. "I know what I shall do this time. I shall snub him unmercifully; show him unmistakably that I—I am——"

"Not indulging in curates," put in Harry, and dodged the sofa cushion thrown at him skilfully.

"Wretch!" said his sister.

"Let me go through the list now," continued her tormentor. "There was Long John."

"Pooh! Animated bandbox!"

"Old Whiffles we will not count, as he had a large wife and six small children."

Daisy sniffed.

"Then there was dear little Bobby with his red hands and his red hair."

"Harry, you are irreverent!"

"No, not at all. Simply stating a series of palpable facts."

"Oh, do be quiet," exclaimed Daisy; "go and play tennis with Connie Weston. She'll make love to you!"

This was carrying the war into the enemy's camp, as Daisy Kemp knew.

"Not I," said Harry loftily, "not quite my taste."

"She used to be," said Daisy softly.

"Oh, shut up!" And Harry retired defeated.

The scene was the morning-room at Avondale Vicarage, and the speakers were the only children of the Reverend Archibald Kemp, who adored them both, and as his parishioners—some of them—averred, spoilt them. The time was June, and the pretty garden on which the open French windows looked out, was ablaze with sunshine and bloom. Daisy Kemp—everyone called her that, though her real name was Margaret, after her long-dead mother—was twenty-one, her brother nineteen. There was no trace of Tennyson's "Rare, Pale Margaret" in the former. She was a curly-haired, round and rosy-faced kitten, with a dimpled chin, and, as may have been gathered, a horror of being made love to by curates! Her brother Harry was a replica of his father—open-browed, tall, broad-shouldered, and honest-eyed, a typical country English lad of the type one hopes, for the honour of the country, will never be extinct.

Perfectly true it was that all her father's curates fell in love with Daisy. She sincerely wished they would not. But they all did, some at first sight, some gradually—but they all did! Then they proposed to her, were friendlily but firmly refused, and went away in search of pastures new and forgetfulness. It was, as Daisy said, and she meant it, too, very disagreeable.

The Vicar, easy-going and large-hearted, was amused probably. But he went on tending his roses, of which he was a lover and a connoisseur, as well as a great grower, and only bemoaned one fact—that he was singularly unlucky in his curates. The last one, whom Daisy had refused in terms more straightforward and unmistakable than usual, had been a fine specimen of muscular Christianity, and the Vicar had liked him more than the others. But he went; and his successor was expected daily. The Vicar did not want to lose his little housekeeper, as he called her, but he would not have been very displeased to give her to Ronald Mortimer. However, there it was—and the Vicar hid his disappointment, if any existed, in his roses.

Avondale was not a large parish, but in it every strata of society was represented, from the aristocratic, through successive stages, to the democratic. Some of the Vicar's curates had found it difficult to manage. Those who got on well with the higher circles, were very unpopular with the lower. And, quite naturally, the Vicar wanted to keep friends with both. Hence the reason, in addition to refusal by Daisy, of the frequent changes of curates. They came, they saw, they were conquered—and they went!

"What is Mr. Bentham like?" was Daisy's question at lunch that day. Harry gave a grin; the Vicar looked at his daughter innocently.

"Wait and see, my child," was all he said.

"When is he coming?"

"I told Mr. Smithers to have his rooms ready to-night."

"Another victim," murmured Harry, in a low tone, and was favoured with a sisterly frown from Daisy. More than this her father would not say, indeed, did not know. But on her return from a kindly visit to an old pensioner whose cottage lay some mile beyond the outskirts of the little town of Avondale, Daisy found out for herself what "Mr. Bentham was like." For she found her father and the curate in the twilight, saying "Good-night."

"My daughter, Mr. Bentham," said the Vicar absently. "Yes, as you were saying, there is much always to be thought of and to do."

"Yes, indeed," replied Mr. Bentham, in what struck Daisy as a peculiarly unpleasant voice.

"Dad," she remarked, when indoors later, "he is absolutely ugly."

"Oh, no, dear, Plain, perhaps, but not so bad as that."

"I don't like him."

The Vicar discreetly said nothing. He knew his daughter almost as well as he knew his favourite roses.

Seen in the daylight, Richard Bentham almost, but not quite, bore out Miss Daisy's opinion. But only the close observer,

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with perception of character, would have seen that his mouth was firm, strong, and humorous; his eyes were keen, honest; his bearing that of a mannered gentleman, if his figure was slight and, perhaps, a little crooked. He was quiet—some of the ignorant called him shy—but in less than a month the Vicar adored him, and he was Harry's inseparable companion when duty offered occasion.

But Daisy hated him, and made no scruples about saying so. He hurt her pride by snubbing her, by being quite indifferent to her. He came into the morning-room at the vicarage, where the Vicar had established him as one of the family, and caught Daisy in a favourite position, namely, sitting on the table. Out of sheer defiance she remained where she was. She was apt to be wilful at times.

Richard Bentham shook hands with her, and in a voice whose matter of fact tone robbed the remark of every trace of rudeness, said:

"A curiously inelegant position, Miss Kemp."

"I like it," retorted Daisy.

"I don't think it very ladylike," said the curate calmly, turning to Harry as he spoke.

Daisy coloured furiously.

"And who taught you what ladylike manners are?" she demanded, as angry as a child in a fit of temper.

"My mother," said the curate simply.

Daisy sprang from her seat, opened her lips to speak, and ran out of the room without a word.

"You have put your foot in it," said Harry, after a short silence.

"I forgot. You have had no mother for years. Oh, will she ever forgive me?"

"If you ask me," said Harry drily, "I don't think she will. You know, old fellow, the Vicar loves you, and you are the best friend I ever had, but my sister hates you—there—the truth is out. And she doesn't trouble to conceal the fact."

"That is very evident. I am sorry. Will you apologise to her for me? I was inexpressibly rude. Now, what is this business you wanted to ask me about?"

But Daisy was too angry, too full of wounded pride to cry. She was locked in her own room overlooking the roses, saying over and over again, "I hate you, I hate you." Presently she saw her brother and Richard Bentham crossing the garden. She clenched her little fist and shook it at the curate.

"I hate you," she repeated; "and I will never forget it, or forgive you!"

After that day she studiously avoided Richard Bentham. If compelled to be in the same room with him, she never addressed him. She accepted his gently tendered apology with the curt remark that she had completely forgotten the matter, and did not understand his meaning. This was quite true—in one sense. She had never thought of the use by him of the word "mother" in reference to herself. He thought she did, and that he had offended her past all pardon. Nothing was further away from Daisy's thoughts. He had hurt her self-pride, that was all she could think. He made one attempt at explanation. She refused point-blank to listen to him. She calmly ignored him. And Richard Bentham did not know whether he was sorry or merely surprised.

Out of such small beginnings as this, great things grow. But two months of July rain and August sun tempered with such changes of the climate as the beneficent clerk of the weather felt from time to time inclined to bestow upon Avondale, went past. Upon the very hottest day in that summer, Daisy Kemp was cool—to the curate. When they met, as they necessarily did at times, she spoke as little to him as possible and looked less. It may have hurt him, but if it did he did not show it.

One muggy, unseasonable day in late August, Daisy met her brother on the tennis lawn. He was swinging his racquet carelessly, but the expression on his face was not quite careless. Daisy knew that he had, with the Vicar, been talking to Mr. Bentham.

"I have a message for you," Harry said curtly, as though he did not much enjoy the delivery of the said message. Daisy smiled. Then she noticed her brother's serious face, and the smile died away.

"What is it?" she exclaimed with some anxiety. For Harry was as a rule so bright and merry that a premonition of ill seemed to strike her at once.

"Oh, it's all right! But Bentham told me to tell you not to go up to the Sinclairs again until he lets you know."

"He lets me know!" said Daisy, with a scathing emphasis.

"Yes," said Harry; and he turned away.

"What right——" began Daisy; but her brother was out of reach and hearing. Her heart began to beat furiously. Indeed, what right had Richard Bentham to send her such a peremptory message. The Sinclairs were her friends—the little four-year-old Dolly Sinclair was her especial pet, and Mr. Bentham had forbidden her to see them! What did it mean?

Daisy stamped her little wilful foot on the green lawn. It made no kind of impression on the grass, but it relieved the beating, angry heart very much.

"I will go," she said to herself, "and I will go this very afternoon."

The Sinclairs lived in a tiny cottage in the worst part of Avondale, and Daisy, having once been able to help them, had taken a great delight in making frequent visits to their unpretentious home. She adored little Dolly, and the child gleefully looked forward to her visits.

And now—and now—thought Daisy, Mr. Bentham had forbidden her to go and see the Sinclairs, without one word of reason or explanation. What did it mean?

"I *will* go!" said Daisy angrily, hating Richard Bentham, curate, with all the power of hate she could muster up in her womanly heart. And she went.

That same afternoon Richard Bentham found her, sitting in the little parlour of the Sinclairs' cottage, with Dolly Sinclair asleep in her arms.

"Hush. She's asleep," said Daisy, in a more tender tone than she had ever addressed to him. Richard Bentham stood clenching his hands.

"You!" he said. "You!"

"Why not?" said Daisy defiantly.

"Did Harry give you my message?"

"Yes—and what right have you to say what I shall do or shall not do?"

The curate dropped his hat on the little table and sank into a chair.

"I only——" he began.

"Well?" said Daisy, as he hesitated.

The curate rose and paced the little room for a few moments before he spoke.

"You have been away, Miss Daisy," he then said, "away for ten days."

"Yes."

"You do not know what has happened since you went in Avondale?"

"Of course not. I only returned last night."

"Your father did not tell you?"

"No. He was out late—very late—last night."

"Can you not guess—or must I tell you? Fever, malignant fever, has broken out in this part of Avondale, and is claiming its victims, old and young, every day. That little mite you are holding in your arms is sickening for it. Now—now can you understand why I warned you, through Harry, not to come to the Sinclairs?"

Daisy gave a brief, tender glance at the child in her arms.

"I should have come even if I had known," she said; "even you——even you could not have prevented me."

"But——"

"I knew when I came into Vale Cottage; Mrs. Sinclair told me at once. I am nursing Dolly while she is lying down for half an hour. I am not afraid. Are you?"

The scorn in Daisy's voice went through Richard Bentham's heart.

"I was thinking of—of you," he said.

Daisy's silence was more expressive than words. But, hearing voices, Mrs. Sinclair, with profuse apologies and much tearful gesture, came upon the scene

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"Give her to me now, Miss Kemp," she said. "I told you Mr. Bentham said I was not to let you nurse her or come near her."

The few simple words were as a lightning-flash to Daisy's brain.

She threw a brief glance at the curate, but he was unconscious of it. Then her pride arose within her and, with a few words of adieu to Mrs. Sinclair, she went away. Mr. Bentham opened the door for her without a word. Daisy herself was too—well, what was it—hurt, offended, proud, pained ?—to speak. But ten days later there was a little white form in the cottage, a baby voice hushed for ever, and a footfall silenced in this world. For Dolly Sinclair—little four-year-old Dolly—was dead. Never again would those little round arms be laid lovingly about Daisy's neck—never again would one sweet baby face be lifted up to receive a kiss.

And then — ah, yes, and then — Daisy Kemp learnt how unselfish, how brave, how strong Richard Bentham had been. It had only been a brief epidemic, which had carried away to the eternal rest some little ones who had scarcely learnt the meaning of life, and some others who had learnt almost all the world could teach them — but it had been a bitter month for Avondale, a time of grief and mourning, work, prayer, and sorrow, and Richard Bentham, beaten at last, lay in his room at Mrs. Smithers' tiny cottage, fighting for life.

"No wonder," said the Vicar sadly. "No wonder," echoed all Avondale. He had absolutely slaved during that brief time of trouble. Now he lay, weak as a child, careless of living or dying, at the mercy of the very fiend he had been strenuously fighting against for the sake of others.

That same afternoon Richard Bentham found Daisy in the cottage of the Sinclairs, with the child asleep in her arms.

Over and over again those words of Connie Sinclair came to Daisy's mind. "I told you Mr. Bentham said you were not to nurse her or come near her." He had thought of her and her safety then. Why ? She had so scorned him, so despised him ; and he was now lying so near to death. Why had he so thought of her ? Could it—could it be that he, too, like the others, had fallen in love with her ? But no. There was never any suggestion of such a thing in his voice, his manner, his—oh, and now there never might be !

"If he dies !"

That was the one phrase ringing in Daisy's thoughts.

"If he dies !"

The brief epidemic had passed. Richard Bentham's work had killed it, had stamped it out. And as if in revenge the demon-fever had seized upon him, laid him low, bound him, and was dragging him hourly nearer and nearer the gates of eternity. His was the last case—and the worst. The Vicar had obtained a London specialist, but his verdict was "perhaps," and the glorious golden September sunshine flooded the ripe earth, the green leaves turned browner and browner, the sweet days shortened twilight by twilight—and Richard Bentham, curate, knew nothing, felt nothing, saw nothing.

The fever passed, but the heart, sadly weakened by the long strain, was at almost its last ebb. The haggard face, uglier than ever, and yet with a half divine light in the pitifully weary eyes, lay on the pillow from day to day, and the lips ever spoke in a low whisper, barely audible, one name :

"Daisy !"

Not a little wilful English rosebud was she now, but a reproachful and sorrowful woman—woman all of a sudden. Ever and again that old question would return to her. Why had Richard Bentham been so careful of her ? Why had he thought of her in——

Then she knew. As a flash it came to her. He loved her. Oh, how was it she had not divined it all along !

"Daisy !"

It was her father's voice, broken with unmistakable tears.

"I want you to be brave, my girl, and come and say good-bye to — to ——"

The Vicar broke down here.

"Good-bye ?" whispered Daisy ; "is—is he——?"

"Yes. He is dying."

Without a word Daisy Kemp went with her father hand in hand to Richard Bentham's bedside. She steeled herself for the ordeal, and with agony in her heart, knelt down beside the dying man whom she knew now she loved — loved indeed.

His tired eyes turned to her drawn face ; his thin hand clasped hers.

"Daisy !" he murmured ; "I wanted to see you before—forgive——"

She put her quivering lips to his hand in reply.

"Daisy—I love you—I have—always loved—you—from the—first."

"Dear——"

"Tell me—you—care—if——"

Daisy's eyes were blurred with tears, her whole form shook with pain. She rose slightly and put her warm lips upon those of Richard Bentham, and kissed him tenderly.

No one but herself heard the words that he murmured :

"You have—brought—me back—to life—beloved."

And she had.

The love of a strong man is not always shown by sweet words and tender expressions, but by his deeds.

Clifton Bingham.

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Jack Browne's Mistake.

How a Young Officer Made a Bad Affair Worse.

Jack Browne and a select few of his brother officers sat in solemn conclave in the mess-room one evening after their seniors had retired, discussing the desperate condition of his affairs.

Jack was a foolish, extravagant, young subaltern in a line regiment, who had contrived to get deeply into debt without the slightest chance of extricating himself from his difficulties. His only relative was a strong-minded maiden aunt, who not only refused to assist him, but even threatened to withdraw the allowance she made him since he entered the Army.

He considered he was being very hardly treated, for the truth is, he did not properly appreciate what his aunt had already done for him.

There was no doubt, however, that he was in an awkward predicament, for on the one hand he could not possibly remain in the regiment unless his debts were paid, and, on the other, his aunt declared that if he resigned his commission she would have nothing more to do with him.

Jack did not at all relish the prospect of being compelled to earn his living, especially as he had no idea how to set about it. Moreover, he was extremely popular in his regiment, and was consequently loath to leave it. His brother officers, unfortunately, could only assist him by their sympathy, and by suggesting various expedients for raising money, none of which were practicable.

"I should try the old lady again," urged one of his friends; "make a clean breast of everything and work upon her feelings."

"She has none!" returned Jack ruefully. "Her venerable heart is insensitive to tender emotions."

"I suppose you haven't concealed what a serious fix you are in?" suggested another.

"No. At least, I put my position to her as plainly as I dare," said Jack; "but it's no go."

"Won't Isaacs raise the wind?" suggested somebody.

"My dear fellow, the only possible way I could raise a shilling would be by pawning my boots, and as they are not paid for I might get into difficulty over that," said Jack, as he plunged his hands deeper into his pockets. "Besides, I've no evidence that I'm named in her will."

"I've an idea!" exclaimed his particular friend, Charlie Bashford. "Why don't you volunteer for service in West Africa?"

"Volunteer to catch cholera! No, thanks," said Jack, making a grimace. "Besides, there is no fighting going on now, so what would be the use?"

"There is a terrible deal more danger now than there was during the war," remarked Charlie, sagely.

"Yes, but no glory. If I wanted to exchange, I would go to India, but, the fact is, I'm past that dodge. My creditors would be down on me directly if they heard I was off. They are down on me enough already," he added despondently.

"What I meant was that you might bamboozle the old lady. Hang it all, Jack! She must care for you, or she would have thrown you over long ago," said his friend, with charming candour. "Perhaps if she heard you had determined, in desperation, to go to Africa, at the risk of your life, she might relent."

"Well, there's something in that," said Jack, brightening up. "At all events, she might give me a cheque for an outfit. The worst of it is, I don't want to go."

"I know a namesake of yours in the 78th, Jack, who is going out next month," interposed another. "If the worst came to the worst, you might go by proxy."

"By Jove! I really think that might be managed," exclaimed Jack excitedly. "It is just possible, as Charlie says, that the old girl would pay my debts to keep me in England. If she doesn't, seeing the other fellow's name in the papers, she will imagine I have gone."

"You can easily keep up the joke by getting your namesake over there to post some letters for you," chimed in Charlie Bashford. "If she doesn't beg you to return after a week or two, you can pretend to be laid up with cholera. That will bring the old lady up to time, if anything will, but in case it doesn't, you can be ordered home—see?"

"Meanwhile, I shall have to keep quiet, and will go away on sick leave," added Jack, in a great state of excitement. "Here, give me pen and paper. I'll fire off a letter at once."

Impulsiveness was one of Jack's failings, and on the spur of the moment he sat down and wrote the following heart-rending epistle—

My Dear Aunt,—*Your refusal to assist me further leaves me no alternative but to quit my native shores for ever. I have volunteered for service in West Africa, where, as you know, the cholera is raging. I start on the second of next month per P. and O. steamer* Capua, *and proceed to join the 78th, which is stationed in the centre of the most infected district. It would be useless to attempt to conceal the fact that I shall encounter terrible risks from the awful disease, but the desire to serve my country at a post of real danger is no less an inducement to me than the prospect of being released by the hand of death from my debts and embarrassments. I can scarcely hope, from our recent correspondence, that my departure will be a source of concern to you, but, at all events, I shall always gratefully remember your many kindnesses. My outfit means a matter of two hundred pounds, but whether you care to assist me in getting it is a question which you alone can decide. Hoping your rheumatism is better,*

"Believe me, your affectionate nephew,

"J. L. Browne."

All the company had a hand in producing this masterpiece of composition, which was universally admired.

The general opinion was that the old lady would be entirely overcome. Jack was easily persuaded to indulge in hopeful anticipations, though he had secret misgivings.

Unfortunately his forebodings turned out to be well founded for his aunt did not attempt to dissuade him from going.

Her reply was so cold and formal that Jack could not help suspecting that she doubted his good faith, and more especially as, in consenting to pay for his outfit, she stipulated that the bills should be sent in to her for settlement.

Jack was somewhat unreasonably aggrieved at this precaution, which, however, reconciled him to the idea of carrying out his project of deception.

He had no difficulty in securing the co-operation of his namesake, and by arrangement with this fatefully good-natured young gentleman, he succeeded in securing the best part of the money which his aunt advanced for his outfit.

The old lady little suspected that she was paying the bills and the passage money of a perfect stranger, and that the latter handed to Jack the amount he had intended to devote to that purpose.

Jack suffered considerable qualms of conscience while hatching his conspiracy. His necessities, however, were so

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pressing that he could not resist the chance of getting a little ready money.

Had he anticipated that his aunt would have manifested genuine emotion when he went to bid her farewell he would probably have abandoned his scheme.

But by that time it was too late, for he had paid away the two hundred pounds among his hungry creditors, and the date of his supposed departure was fixed for the next day.

Jack applied for three months' leave of absence from his regiment to obviate the risk of his presence in England coming to his aunt's ears.

The colonel, knowing nothing of his plans, but sympathising with his pecuniary troubles, granted his request without asking inconvenient questions.

Jack's brother officers were pledged to secrecy, and one of them—the incorrigible Charlie Bashford—wrote the old lady a pathetic account of his friend's departure. Jack, on his part, retired to a remote village in North Wales, where he could solace himself with trout-fishing while awaiting the issue of his equivocal manœuvres.

He was not without hope that his aunt would speedily recall him from Egypt with a promise to pay his debts.

He had authorised his namesake to open the old lady's letters, and to telegraph to him immediately in case his anticipations should be realised.

Meanwhile, he had furnished his fellow-conspirator with a number of letters to be posted in West Africa from time to time, and these contained such harrowing details of the ravages of cholera that his aunt could scarcely fail to become seriously alarmed and uneasy.

Jack remained a month or six weeks in Wales, during which his scheme worked without a hitch.

His aunt was completely deceived, and even forwarded his first letter from Africa to his friend, Charlie Bashford, to read.

The note in which she inclosed the letter plainly showed that her heart was softening towards him, and Jack began to feel a good deal ashamed of himself.

During his solitary walks and rambles he had fits of penitence which considerably damped his satisfaction at the success of his experiment.

He even felt tempted at times to abandon the deception he was practising, but before he had arrived at any determination to do so he was surprised at receiving a visit from his friend, Charlie Bashford.

"Hullo! What brings you here?" demanded Jack apprehensively as they shook hands.

"You've heard the news, haven't you?" said Charlie.

"What about?" said Jack.

"Haven't you seen the papers lately?" asked Charlie, opening his eyes.

"Not for a week or ten days. What is it?"

"Then you don't know poor Browne is dead," said Charlie. "We all of us thought you knew of it, or I should have written. It was in all the papers a week ago. He died of cholera."

"What! you don't mean the man who went to Egypt the other day?" gasped Jack.

"Yes," said Charlie, grinning at his friend's dismay.

"Well, but that is fearfully awkward for me! My aunt must be under the impression that I am dead. What the dickens shall I do?" exclaimed Jack.

"I wrote the poor old lady a letter of condolence to keep up the deception," said Charlie.

"What an infernal fool you were, then!" exclaimed Jack vigorously. "What on earth did you want to do that for?"

"Well, I did it for a joke, but I was sorry for it afterwards. In fact, as far as the poor old lady was concerned, I've repented it ever since. However, there is no harm done as far as you are concerned," added Charlie, cheerfully.

"I'm not by any means sure of that," growled Jack. "I can't be lost for ever, and the matter must come to my aunt's ears. If you had written and hinted that there might be a mistake you would have done me a good turn. As it is, you've only made matters worse."

"We thought you would be in a furious stew when you heard the news, and wondered at your keeping so quiet," said Charlie. "I came down out of pure charity to ease your mind. You have had a lucky escape.

"The poor old lady is dead, so, as I said before, there is no harm done to your prospects."

Under the circumstances, it is perhaps excusable that Jack's first sensation was a feeling of intense relief. A moment ago he was fairly horrified at learning the awkward position in which he was placed by the death of his namesake.

Considering that his future prospects depended entirely upon his aunt's goodwill, it seemed as though ruin stared him in the face. Exposure of the trick he had played upon her was apparently inevitable, and her forgiveness could scarcely have been hoped for.

Of course, he had known all along that he had run this risk, but he had never anticipated the sad event which upset all his calculations, and had considered himself tolerably secure from detection, whatever else happened.

The grief and remorse which lurked in Jack's bosom in consequence of his aunt's death were, therefore, at the moment overshadowed by mingled relief and excitement.

The vital importance of the sad event as regarded his private affairs not unnaturally preoccupied his mind. If, as he not unreasonably believed, he was the old lady's heir, he would be able to pay off his debts and make a fresh start under favourable conditions.

He hurried up to town without a moment's delay, and went straight to the office of his aunt's legal adviser.

He knew that this gentleman was her executor and had the management of her affairs, and he was anxious to put an end to the suspense and uncertainty regarding his future prospects. In his eagerness he forgot the surprise his sudden appearance was likely to cause, and consequently felt rather abashed when the lawyer started back on seeing him.

"What, Mr. Browne!" exclaimed the old gentleman, as soon as he could speak. "Why, I—I—and everybody else, thought you had died in Africa the other day."

"No. The fact is, it was all a mistake," said Jack, in a shame-faced manner.

"Oh! Then I suppose you never went there at all," said the lawyer, after a short pause, during which he fixed his sharp eyes on the young man's face.

"No, I did not," said Jack, overcome with confusion, "I—I am very sorry."

"Well, so you ought to be sir, for you killed your aunt. Ah! you did, indeed! I mean what I say," he added sharply. "When the news of your supposed death appeared in the papers she had a fit and never recovered the shock. But if she had not cared for you more than you did for her she would be alive at this moment.

"She blamed herself for being the cause of your death, and that intensified the shock. Had she followed her own inclination she would have made any pecuniary sacrifice to keep you out of danger. But she thought, for your own sake, you had better do a little campaigning; and, besides, she was inclined to suspect—rightly, as it now appears—that you did not really intend to go."

"I'm glad, at all events, that she never found me out," said Jack, wiping away the beads of perspiration that had gathered on his forehead. "She did not suspect what a brute I was in return for all her kindness."

"No," said the lawyer, fixing his keen glance upon Jack's face again. "Unfortunately for you, she never doubted you were dead."

"Why unfortunately?" inquired Jack absently.

"Because she sent for me at the last moment and made a fresh will, in which your name is not mentioned. Up till then you were her residuary legatee." **Hal Evans.**

THE PAPER A BOY CAN TAKE HOME IS "THE BOYS' LEADER."

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THE COUNTRY COUSIN.

A Bachelor's Love Story.

JAMES RYDER was a confirmed bachelor, but not in the sense which people usually attach to that term. He had not the slightest inclination to marry, and not one of the many persons who knew him was under any delusion on that head. When a man still on the sunny side of fifty, good-looking, and possessed of independent means, declares solemnly that he will never marry, his friends generally smile (when out of sight) and remark that they have heard that kind of talk before; but no one did this in connection with James Ryder. He was not averse to the society of ladies; he lived alone, but he was always ready to accept an invitation to a party and was usually a favourite with the fair sex, yet it was quite understood that he was determined to remain a bachelor.

The majority of his numerous friends and acquaintances found this problem a perplexing one; it passed their comprehension. If the man had been crossed in love, he would have had his disposition soured and would have vented his ill-will on all the members of the opposite sex. James Ryder did nothing of the kind. He had actually helped one worthy young couple in the district to get married; the swain had been working hard to save enough money to purchase the home, but illness had overtaken him, lessening the amount of his savings, and further postponing the happy day. Ryder sent him away for a month, which restored him to robust health, and then gave him a handsome money present which obviated the necessity for further waiting. Ryder was asked to give away the bride and did so.

What ailed the man? A slight clue was obtained when Ryder once laughed at love at first sight. After that it was remembered that he had occasionally laughed when he heard that such or such a couple were in love, and asked the informant if the pair were really certain that they were in love. There was a trace of cynicism in his tone which made the listeners wonder. However, the real facts were a mystery till his nephew, a handsome young fellow of two-and-twenty, came to stay with him for a week, and, during that period, confessed that he was in love with the best and sweetest girl in Christendom and meant to propose. He had fallen in love with her the first moment he set eyes on her bewitching——

"Yes," said Uncle James drily. "I know all about that; I had an attack myself once on a time, when I was about your age. Oh, you need not protest, Bob! Love is a kind of madness; a man gets an attack of it and it blinds him for the time to the attractions of all other women. The question of suitability doesn't trouble him; he wants that girl and no other. Later, he will admit to himself that he did not choose as wisely as he might have done. And the girl will think the same respecting her own choice."

"You are wrong, uncle!" cried Bob emphatically.

"Perhaps I am," returned James Ryder equably. "Yet I think I am right in four cases out of five. A man often has the chance of obtaining a wife who would make him a splendid helpmate, yet he cannot see his opportunity. Love is a strange thing and a man—or a woman—ought to keep a level head when looking for a life partner!"

"Why, you would destroy all the romance of courtship!" declared Bob aghast.

"I wonder," asked Ryder musingly, "how many people can look back on their courtship and be satisfied with it, romantic as you say it is? Perhaps, if there were less romance at that time, there would be more of it after marriage! However, Bob, I do not wish to interfere with your love affairs, but I will tell you my own story and that will give you an idea of what a strange thing love is and how a man may be unaware of his own feelings. Different circumstances—— But let us get to the story! Light up a cigar and don't interrupt me!"

The two men settled themselves comfortably in the cosy chairs of the bright apartment which James Ryder called his "den." Bob listened while his uncle revealed his secret.

"I have already mentioned" (so ran James Ryder's story), "that I was about twenty-two. I had an aunt in an East Anglian village and that aunt had two daughters. She also had two sons, both of them were fellow students of mine at a medical college. I never completed my medical studies, I may say, by the way. The youngest of the four was Emily, and she and I became good friends. I did not fall in love with her at first sight, but she attracted me both by her pretty face and well-moulded figure and by her general goodness. That's the best word to describe her character and manners.

"The idea of becoming enamoured of a country cousin would have made me laugh before I went down, and probably this had its effect on me and prevented me from forming a proper opinion. As the time wore on, I found greater pleasure in her society, and I was really sorry when I had to go. I thought that she was sorry too.

"I became more sorry after my return to ordinary duties. It was not the mere reaction of going back to work after a holiday; I felt that I would like to see more of Emily, and I began to blame myself for not having given more evidence of my sentiments. I comforted myself with the reflection that I had once expressed my opinion, to her sister, that Emily was more attractive than I had expected to find her. Perhaps that would be reported to Emily, I thought; for sisters must have their confidences!

"So the time went on and winter arrived. I had by that time come to the conclusion that I would endeavour to spend a week in that village at Christmas time and ascertain whether I still liked her as I thought I did and whether she liked me.

"The winter promised to be very gay for us; there were balls and parties galore in prospective, and we anticipated a grand time. I danced with this girl and that girl, but, notwithstanding their great smartness from a Society point of view, I still looked back to the country cousin.

"I had heard very little of her from her brothers, who seemed reticent. I could not introduce the subject too often, as that would betray me. So very little was said on either side.

"Then came a night which I am not likely to forget. There was a masked ball with fancy dress to this extent—that we could dress in the costume of any European country at any period. I resolved to get myself up as a cavalier; I was rather

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partial to the Charles I. style of dress, and I fancied that I appeared rather fetching with the long curls and so forth. I was not quite pleased that it was to be a masked ball, because the domino hides the upper part of the face and spoils the effect, but it was a fad on the part of our hostess, Lady Mitcham.

"My two cousins went to the ball, but we did not drive there together as we usually did, because they had arranged to take a lady to whom the elder was engaged. I soon recognised them in their costumes, which were very ordinary and need not be mentioned.

"I was in grand form and had no lack of partners, for I was a good dancer. Very early in the evening my attention was drawn to a French peasant who looked very charming and whose eyes shone like — well, I was going to say 'like meteors,' because 'like stars' is such a hackneyed metaphor, but I'm not sure that all meteors do shine brilliantly. Anyhow, those eyes seemed to go through you, and it occurred to me that they were often fixed on me. I resolved to have a dance with that French peasant girl, so I waited my opportunity and, when a partner led her to a seat, I approached her and asked for the honour of a dance.

"I was fortunate enough to get the next dance, a delightful waltz. Ah! I cannot recall it, after all these years, without a thrill! She was a grand waltzer, and that dance was bliss.

"The waltz terminated, I was leading her back to her seat, asking her if I might have the next dance, when she interrupted me.

"'I am hot and rather tired!' she said softly. 'I would prefer to sit in the conservatory, where it is, at least, less warm, and you may leave me if you wish to join the next dance.'

"'Impossible! I cannot leave you alone! What would the next dance be without you!' I cried ecstatically. 'Only permit me to rest here with you!'

"She made no reply, but the face was turned from me. I bent forward in order to catch a glimpse of the eyes that had thrilled me, and it seemed to me that they were liquid—the fire had disappeared and moisture filled them. My heart felt as if it had been stabbed. I placed my hand on hers and asked her to tell me her trouble. I was positive that she was in trouble.

"I drew her closer, and once more tried to press my lips to hers. Again she gently put me off."

"However, just as I thought she was about to reply, my two cousins strolled through the conservatory. I suppose that Jack, the elder, had left his sweetheart dancing with someone, for the strains of the music flowed towards us, and that they had come here for a rest. They looked at me, and Jack said quizzically: 'I won't disturb you, old fellow!' and they passed on with a courtly bow to the lady.

"'Confound their impudence!' I muttered. 'I can talk to a girl if I wish, can't I?'

"And I did wish! I took her hand and spoke softly to her. I knew—or I imagined I knew!—that I had found my affinity. Why should I be so attracted to this stranger, if it were not that she were the one being in the world who could make me happy?

"I cannot tell you all I said. I besought her to confide in me and —— But there! As you are in love yourself, you understand very well what I said! It's much the same with every man!

"She told me that I reminded her of a man who had not proved worthy. He had paid her great attention and had gone away and left her. It was something of a shock to discover that she had cared for another, even if ever so little, but I soon got over it. I assured her that it was fate; that if it had not been so, I should not have been the lucky fellow I was that evening, and that she would have missed the one man who could and would make her life a path of roses. I ended by trying to clasp her in my arms, but she gently repulsed me.

"'Perhaps I am doing him an injustice!' she murmured. 'It may have been only my own foolish fancy! He never breathed a word that I could construe as a confession of love, but in other ways I was led to imagine that——' She sighed. 'Yet he was so noble! I cannot think that he intended to treat me as a mere toy! I do so wish to act justly towards him. Would you consider it—I mean——'

"She became confused.

"She was evidently anxious to learn whether or not I regarded it as wrong on the part of a man to flirt or to trifle with the affections of an innocent girl. I was on the point of declaring energetically that a man should not pay marked attentions to, or flirt with, any girl and then leave her with an aching heart, when a terrible thought struck me. It might

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be that Emily was thinking the very same about me at that moment!

"But I forced the thought out of my mind. Emily had been well enough in her way, but this French peasant by my side was a queen to her.

"I did not attempt to answer the question which she had tried to put to me. I leant over again, and drew her close to me and whispered words of love into her ear. She listened, half-unwillingly, as I could not help fancying, but I continued. Then I drew her closer and once more tried to press my lips to hers. And again she gently put me off!

"'Have *you* ever loved another woman?' she demanded suddenly. 'How can I be sure that you are sincere, after my former experience?'

"I was staggered, and not best pleased with this prosaic turn of things. Poetry is what you want when you have an attack of love fever, not matter-of-fact prose like that? Besides, it was an awkward inquiry. I might truthfully have said that I had never made love to a woman, but in my own heart I had to admit that I had experienced very tender sentiments for Emily lately! I hesitated. I imagined I detected a look of triumph in the eyes that were now gazing fully at me. She was distinctly agitated; I could see her breast heaving and her breathing was laboured. I remained silent.

"'I heard,' she said softly, 'that you were in love with a cousin in the country!'

"I could have uttered something uncomplimentary about my male cousins; they must know this girl and they had said something to her concerning my holiday!

"Then my coolness returned to me; I was able to reflect calmly. I sat with my eyes away from hers, boldly revolving the thing in my mind, and I decided against Emily. There was no haste about it, despite the circumstances. I decided deliberately in favour of the French peasant girl. I realised that the latter was waiting anxiously for my reply, and I felt a sentiment of triumph.

"'I am not in love with my country cousin!' I cried at length. 'I know who has told you that, but he is wrong, they are both wrong and I will pay them out for prejudicing you against me!'

"'Then you do not love her?' came the query in a trembling voice.

"'How could I, when I have you?' I answered hotly. 'She is as a common field-flower compared with a flower of rarest excellence—you are incomparable! Take off that mask and tell me your name, that I may know and possess you!' I added ardently.

"'Not now, not now!' she cried in agitation. Her voice appeared very different. 'You will know before long! I will make myself known to you! I must go!'

"And before I could grasp the fact, she had fled!

"I searched everywhere for my French peasant girl, but without avail. I should have recognised her at once naturally, even if there had been ten other French peasant girls at the ball instead of her being the only one; but she was gone!

"At supper we unmasked and there were some surprises, as usual, but I was not interested. I wanted to have a word or two with my cousins and give them a piece of my mind for telling tales out of school, but the younger was gone and the elder had his sweetheart with him, so I could do nothing.

"The next day, Tom—that was the younger of my cousins—came to me and asked me if I enjoyed the ball.

"'I needn't make that inquiry, though!' he cried, without giving me time to speak. 'You fell in love with a girl there, didn't you? You will be glad to learn her identity. That note will tell you!'

"He flung a note on my table and walked out with an expression of annoyance and contempt on his features. I had a good mind to call him back and administer a thrashing, but I refrained and tore open the note.

"It was from Emily. I remember what was in that note very well; every word is engraved on my memory; but I shall not repeat it. I will merely tell what had happened.

"Emily had been invited to spend a few days with an old friend of her mother; she had accepted the invitation gladly. Her brothers enjoined her to keep her arrival a secret and to go to the ball, where she would meet me. They believed that I was in love with their sister, and that a surprise meeting would be a happy event for me.

"She went, and her brothers contrived to draw my attention to the French peasant girl; they wondered if I should recognise her in her disguise. That disguise, aided by the domino, had been so good that it had deceived me.

"Emily herself had played a small part; she loved me dearly, but was in doubt about my feelings towards her. Unconsciously she had followed my movements with eyes of love, and this had helped to draw me nearer to her and had made those eyes shine more brightly. Have you never experienced the strange sensation of *feeling* that someone is looking fixedly at you, and have turned to discover that it is really so?

"I cannot explain why I fell in love with that peasant girl, and why, under the influence of that spell, I scorned Emily, for they were one and the same!

"Emily had thrown herself thoroughly into the part, so far as the make-up was concerned, having actually darkened her hair and otherwise disguised herself. I have no doubt that her original intention was to give me a surprise—a pleasant one, as she believed. Then probably, being only human, she thought to gain some idea of the state of my feelings. When I actually began to make love to her as the French peasant girl, she half believed that I knew quite well to whom I was talking, but she asked about the country cousin in order to make certain. And then she heard herself spoken of with derision!

"Did I tear up that letter? No, I did not; I kept it as a proof of man's peculiar construction. I despised and loved the same woman, according to circumstances! It was not as if she had done anything to make me despise her, mind you. It shows that love is a mystery beyond solution by mortals. Weeks afterwards, when I could meditate calmly, I recognised charms in Emily which I had not seen during my holiday, and I anathematised myself for my stupidity, and yet—I loved the French peasant girl also! If they had been distinct personalities, and I had married one, should I have been happy or should I have wished that I had married the other?"

"That's a curious experience!" cried Bob when James Ryder had ceased speaking. "But how lucky you would have been in the circumstances if you had married her!"

"H'm!" said his uncle doubtfully. "However, I didn't marry her; she wouldn't look at me after that, of course! I have lost track of her these many years, but I have never forgotten her!"

"You mean that you have never ceased to love her?" asserted Bob boldly.

"You rascal! Well, you are right! But my story may act as a warning against falling in love at first sight! It may be a lesson to you——"

"Ah, but Amy is the best of——" began Bob.

"It's all right, Bob!" laughed James Ryder. "No amount of experience on the part of one man will alter the course taken by another in matters of love! I congratulate you and wish you joy!"

J. Hubert.

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Concludes in this Number.

THE "BRIDGE" OF RUIN.

Being the

CONFESSIONS OF A GIRL GAMBLER.

EPISODE TWENTY-THREE.

Ray to the Rescue Again.

"THERE, dear, drink this. It'll do you a world of good."

I looked up languidly, to see Mrs. Windsor bending over me. She held a glass of medicine to my lips, and after drinking it mechanically, I felt so much better that memory of recent events suddenly returned to me.

"Oh!" I shuddered, "however did you get me away from that horrible man?"

"It was Mr. Ray who did it," replied Mrs. Windsor. "He came here a little while after you had left. If you had gone the nearest way to the station you would have met him."

"Mr. Ray! Whatever could have brought him here!"

"You, of course! He wanted to know how you were getting on, and when I saw how concerned he was about having missed you, I told him everything I knew. My word, he was in a rage! I fancy he'll give more than one person a piece of his mind. But he didn't stop here long, for he wanted to find you before you got into your train. He was following the directions I had given him, and was walking quickly round the bend of the Spinney Lane, when he heard a faint cry ahead of him, and ran till he came up to where a man was bending over a prostrate body. The man thought the coast was clear, and didn't observe Mr. Ray till he was close upon him. But he felt the weight of his fist, and made off in a hurry, leaving Mr. Ray to get you home the best way he could. As luck would have it, the grocer's cart came along the lane soon afterwards, and the grocer's man helped Mr. Ray to bring you here, for you had fainted. And that's all!"

So I owed another deep debt of gratitude to the man who had already done so much for me! Of course, I could never repay him. Neither could I hope to retain his goodwill, or even his friendship, after the exposures which were now inevitable. Mr. Taskot's information about the artist's supposed engagement was, I felt convinced, a falsehood of his enemy's own invention. Nevertheless, it was hardly likely that a man who was so clever and distinguished would think with anything but tolerant pity of a girl who was everlastingly needing somebody to help her out of her troubles.

Still, it comforted me to know that I owed my rescue to the man who had already shown such zeal on my behalf, and I felt as if the solution of all my difficulties must now be close at hand. In this restful mood I fell asleep, and when I awoke, the effects of the attack upon me had quite disappeared. So I got up, put on a fresh frock, and went downstairs, much to the delight of Mrs. Windsor, who had been afraid of serious injury when I was brought home unconscious.

"And here comes the handsome gentleman back again!" she added. "I'll let him in, and I'll leave you to tell him how you are yourself."

Mrs. Windsor was as good as her word, though she would have saved me some embarrassment if she had stayed with me, for I was more than half afraid of meeting the reproaches which my conscience told me were deserved from Mr. Ray.

But he soon put me at my ease, for his manner was kindliness itself, and as soon as he became convinced that I was not much worse for the afternoon's alarming experience, he explained the cause of his presence in Essondon.

"For some time after I had, as I imagined, seen you safely ensconced at Mrs. Grainger's," he said, "I was very busy with the commission I told you of, and did nothing in the way of visiting. But I had no sooner finished the portrait than I set off to pay you a call. I met Mr. Bainbrig by the way, and he told me that there had been a terrific scene of some sort at Mrs. Grainger's, resulting in the hurried departure of yourself and Mr. Taskot."

"Mr. Taskot has been my evil genius," I murmured, flushing hotly at the recollection of the scene in the open four-wheeler.

"Yes, I know that," was the response—"perhaps even better than you know it yourself, for I am too well acquainted with him not to be fully aware of his capabilities. Still, I hardly thought he would go the length of trying to abduct you."

"Was that what he intended doing?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But why?"

"Well, thereby hangs a tale, which I will proceed to unfold. Milward Taskot poses as a rich man, with tremendous expectations to boot, and he is usually accepted in Society at his own valuation—until a scandal occurs. Then he is quickly sent to the rightabout, and seeks fresh fields to exploit. But he is not rich, nor is he ever likely to be rich. So he has tried various ways of earning a living without having to work over it. One of his methods, which has met with more or less success, is to fleece unwary cardplayers, and the Vernons made a huge mistake when they imagined they were going to relieve him of a lot of money, for he is as great a rogue as Vernon himself, which is saying much."

"But they did get a lot of money out of him."

"Yes, but I have compelled them to disgorge it, and I have given it back to Taskot, threatening to expose the whole of his disreputable history if he ventured to annoy you again. I also insisted upon the surrender of the snapshot negatives, so you need fear nothing more from them."

"The Vernons must be afraid of you."

"So they are, and I shall not give them much more rope. They will presently break the conditions I have imposed, and then they will have to leave the neighbourhood which they disgrace by their presence."

"But Vernon Towers is Harry Vernon's ancestral home. At least, Annabel told me so."

"That was only one of her little fibs. They took the place on a lease, and altered its name from Walmsley Towers to Vernon Towers. When they leave the house, as they will soon have to do, it will revert to its former name. But that doesn't explain why Taskot wanted to abduct you."

"No, and I cannot understand why he should, for he must have known I should always hate him."

"You are a 'quick study,' as theatrical people say, and he intended you to marry him under the impression that he was desperately and disinterestedly in love with you. By compromising you with all your friends, he thought to drive you to such despair that you would welcome even him as a means of proving your respectability. Once married, possibly under the coercive influence of a stupefying drug, he would have compelled you to earn money for him by cheating at

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cards. The fact that you refused him upset his calculations, of course, but he was bent upon subjugating you, somehow."

"What a dreadful man! But you must blame me for many things until you hear my explanations."

"No, there you are mistaken, Miss Beresford. I saw the scoundrel kiss you, and I walked away in a great rage, for appearances were certainly against you then. Later on, after I had had time to think things over, I interviewed the cabman, and learnt from him that the kisses were stolen without your consent, for the cabman has good ears and eyes, and had taken note of all that passed. At the station, too, I was able to piece various events together when I made inquiries, and I concluded that Milward Taskot had intended to compromise you by making it seem that you had travelled together. That was what made me decide to come and see how you were getting on, for I dreaded lest more mischief should befall you."

"Mrs. Windsor told you about the vicar calling here?"

"Yes, and I will speak to that charitable gentleman before I leave Essondon. By the time I have finished with him, I daresay he will wish he had possessed a little more charity. By-the-bye, there is an anonymous letter in his possession, is there not?"

"Yes; Mrs. Windsor does not know all the dreadful things that are in it. But she knows that it was the cause of my having to leave here."

"H'm! The reverend gentleman shall give me that letter, and I will tear it up. We must not allow it to crop up again at some unexpected moment."

"You are kinder to me than I deserve, and I shall never be able to thank you sufficiently."

"My dearest, I can never be kinder to you than you deserve! And as for thanks—what thanks does a man want for trying to work out his own happiness?"

This speech was accompanied by such ardent glances into my blushing face that I was filled with confusion, and rose with the intention of putting an end to it by asking Mrs. Windsor to send some tea in. But Mr. Ray, who always seemed to do exactly as he liked with everybody, laid his hand persuasively on mine, and—— Well, really, the things he said to me were such gross flatteries that I will not record them, for nobody but Maurice himself can ever indorse half of them.

"But it is just miraculous!" I stammered at last. "Only this very morning I was the most miserable girl on earth, and the most friendless. Now everything is changed, and if I am to believe my ears, you, who are a thousand times too good for me, actually want to marry me!"

"There is nothing wonderful in that, except that I am the most fortunate man alive to secure such a prize as you are. Why, the first minute I saw you, I knew that my fate was sealed either for happiness or misery!"

"I don't think I ought to accept you—I have been so foolish. And my enemies may continue to persecute me. In that case, there would be danger of disgracing you, and disgrace would ruin your professional career. No, no—you shall never be brought to poverty through me!"

I was quite sincere in resolving to sacrifice my own happiness rather than risk evil consequences to Maurice. But he carried the day in this, as in everything else, and, very much to my amazement, I was presently receiving the congratulations of Mrs. Windsor, who was so delighted at this sudden change in my fortunes that she almost cried her eyes out!

EPISODE TWENTY-FOUR, AND LAST.

The Downfall of the Vernons.

There was considerable sensation in and about Essondon after the grocer's assistant had noised it abroad that a young lady had been attacked in open daylight, and that she would have been abducted if he had not arrived on the spot just in time to vanquish her assailant. His story was slightly beside the mark, but that did not prevent people from regarding the Spinney Lane as too dangerous a place to frequent except in company.

"He was the biggest man I'd ever seen!" so said the grocer's man to Mrs. Windsor. "And his legs were the longest. No wonder he disappeared like the wind when me and the gentleman tackled him."

Probably my assailant did run off at his top speed. But he was no giant, and Maurice by no means despaired of finding him very soon. For he discovered incidentally that Mr. Smedley's guest had had a nasty fall on the kerbstone, after being out for a walk, and that he had broken his ankle.

"Our bird has caged himself," said Maurice. "So if you will, dearest, we will have a final interview with him."

"Do you think I ought to see him again?"

"Certainly! He has certain confessions and retractions to make, and we cannot get the matter settled too soon."

Thus it happened that Maurice and I called at Mrs. Smedley's, and were shown into the breakfast-room, where Mr. Taskot, surrounded by evidences of careful attention, was lying on a couch, with his ankle bound in splints.

The sight of Maurice and me together seemed to enrage him, and he snarled viciously: "To what am I to attribute the honour of a call from you?"

"To my determination to put an end to your persecution of Miss Beresford," was Maurice's instant response. "You met with an accident when returning from your foolish attempt to kidnap my intended wife."

"Your intended wife?"

"Yes, Olive has made me happy by promising to marry me."

"You will have plenty of time to rue marrying a girl who is already spoken of as a——"

"Dare to say the words, and I will choke you, in spite of your present helplessness."

Maurice's vehemence cowed Mr. Taskot at once, and he mumbled sulkily: "What do you want here, anyway?"

"I want the surrender of that set of snapshots you hold."

"You won't get them."

"Either you surrender them at once, or I disclose to our Uncle Walter Taskot all about a certain forgery on your part. There are also other disclosures which would probably cost you at least ten thousand pounds."

"Do you mean that the old fool has altered his will, and that I am only to have ten thousand pounds?"

"Precisely. And the ten thousand pounds will dwindle to a shilling if I am compelled to tell all I know."

I listened to this conversation in increasing wonder, for it explained Maurice's familiarity with Milward Taskot's doings. They were evidently cousins, and it would seem that Maurice was the very nephew whose chances of inheriting from the maligned Walter Taskot, Esq., of Malvern Lodge, were represented to me as so very remote. There was some furious muttering. But Maurice gained his point, and I thankfully saw the compromising snapshots given up by my enemy.

"And now that you have got them," he hissed, "you may be confronted by a fresh set any day."

"No, no," was the complacent answer. "I have secured and destroyed the negatives, together with some copies which the Vernons intended to use presently. Furthermore, I hold the sworn and signed confession of both Harry and Annabel Vernon that the charges against Olive Beresford were fictitious ones. It paid them better to concede to my demands than to risk the instant exposure I threatened, and I feel no compunction at having given them a certain amount of rope, for their swindling career is almost at an end."

"Well, Maurice Ray, I am not so much in love with you that I want to see more of you than I can help."

"Just so, my worthy cousin. I am going as soon as you have written and signed a confession to my dictation."

There were some more protestations and disclaimers. But before we left Milward Taskot's presence he had confessed to many things, Mrs. Smedley being called in to witness the signature to the document, the contents of which were not disclosed to her.

But it set forth that the anonymous letter received by the

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Vicar of Essondon had been Milward Taskot's own concoction, and that none of its contents were justified by facts. In short, Maurice omitted nothing that could exonerate me completely in the eyes of the world, and our next visit was paid to Mr. Snaith, the vicar, who looked very haughtily at me until he was shown Milward Taskot's signed confession.

"I'm very sorry," he stammered, "that I placed a moment's credence in so vile a story, and I apologise most earnestly."

"What has become of the anonymous letter?" asked Maurice, who was none the less stern because the vicar was apologetic.

"I have it locked in my bureau," was the answer. "Nobody but myself has seen it since it came here."

"And nobody else must see it, sir. Kindly give it to me, so that I may tear it up."

This request was granted without hesitation, and it was a very happy girl who presently walked back to Mrs. Windsor's in company with the man who had undertaken to manage her affairs for the rest of her life.

On our arrival, Mrs. Windsor met us with a face so full of mystery and concern that we guessed at something serious.

"Whatever is the matter?" I asked, my hopes instantly dropping to zero, for my happiness was so recent, so unexpected, and so undeserved, that I instantly feared that it was about to vanish.

"Such strange things!" replied my old friend. "What a mercy it is, dear, that you are safe at home!"

"Olive has had rather an exciting time of it while we have been out," observed Maurice. "Suppose she sits down before she hears what you have to tell?"

"To be sure! Come along, dearie. The tea is just ready, so we can talk while we are having it."

I was shaking so much with nervousness that I was glad to sit down, and I looked on with dilating eyes while Maurice read something in a paper Mrs. Windsor handed to him.

"The afternoon edition came in just now," she said, while she busied herself with the tea-cups. "I always like to know what's going on in the world, so I sat down for a half hour's reading. But, my goodness, I did get a turn when I saw 'Vernon Towers' in a big heading."

"Now I can't wait another minute. Let me see what has happened."

"My dear girl," was Maurice's answer to this very natural demand of mine. "There is nothing whatever for you to be anxious about. But it's a terrible thing for Lord A. His son, it seems, formed part of the house-party at Vernon Towers last week. He went with a friend, the son of a well-known Member of Parliament. The local correspondent asserts that they were plied with drink, and that the greater part of their losses took place while they were incapable of playing intelligently. Their joint losses at Bridge amount to forty thousand pounds, only a small part of which, of course, was within their means of paying. The lord's son regarded himself as ruined for life; could not face his people; and shot himself this morning."

"What an awful thing!" I gasped.

"Thank Heaven, there is one comfort, though. Nothing can now save this gang from full exposure, and I expect the next news we hear will be either that they have absconded, to seek fresh fields of mischief, or that the police have arrested them for swindling. There will be no more house-parties held at the Towers."

Maurice was right. The next news we heard corroborated all his deductions. Unfortunately, the brace of swindlers, plus their accomplice, Mr. Dean Fisher, took the alarm directly the young viscount's death was discovered, and absconded with all the money in the house. They have not yet been caught. Milward Taskot also quitted England.

Maurice and I are married now. Mrs. Windsor lives with us, and manages my big house to perfection.

The Bainbrigs, too, are very great friends of ours. But they are like me in that they have sworn never again to have anything more to do with "The Bridge of Ruin."

THE END.

Your Editor Chats.

I SUPPOSE you are all looking forward in anticipation of next week's number to read the opening chapters of our new series. I can assure you that the realisation of it will be even better than the anticipation, for a more exciting opening instalment would be an impossibility. It tells how Sara Gillespie enters the employ of Messrs. Templeton & Co., general agents, as a lady typist. The head of the firm seems to take a very friendly interest in the girl, and also in her absent lover, Noel Masterman, who is at Nice. But it transpires that the assumed friendship of the firm is only a decoy used to enable them to make the girl a tool for their schemes against Noel, concerning whom they hold some documents of the utmost importance. Sara, however, overhears their plotting, and ascertaining that everything connected with Noel and her happiness in the future depends upon the fateful papers that they are discussing, she makes a bold effort for her lover's sake. The cover of next week's issue will depict a striking incident in the first instalment.

———

I MUST thank "C. W." for the very interesting letter he has sent me, and also for the compliments the missive contains. He has, however, an idea that I might with advantage publish a serial story dealing with the chivalrous and romantic times of old England, something after the style of "The Lovers of Yvonne," in preference to modern tales. Now, I quite agree with "C. W." that the old-world epochs afford plenty of scope for stirring stories of love and honour, but I have one great objection to using them at all regularly. "C. W.," who says that he has been an unfailing subscriber for a long time, must have noticed that all my serial stories and series of stories serve two objects; firstly, to amuse and entertain, and secondly, to point out present-day dangers to young men and women. Take, for instance, "The Bridge of Ruin," which concludes this week; and, "C. W.," you will quite see what I mean.

———

YOU will find on two of the earlier pages of this number a couple of sketches entitled "A Society Pair" and "The Coster Couple." These are the forerunners of a set of drawings which I am positive will bring forth your admiration. They are intended to depict the style and actions of lovers in various spheres of life, as well as of different nationalities. The artist who is executing these pictures not only has made a clever study of the faces and general demeanour of his subjects, but has also put a most pleasing finishing touch to his works by inclosing them in very dainty frames. In future issues I shall show, amongst others, types of Parisian, American, Irish, "Coon," Dutch, Russian, Italian, and Breton lovers. Will you let me know what you think of them?

———

I HAVE told you in my first paragraph about the new series in next week's number, and I am writing this to remind you that I have another pleasant surprise in store for you. In a week or so there will be starting in this paper a fine, thrilling serial story by Mr. George Griffith, who, as all of you are probably aware, has written many fine romances. It will be called "A Criminal Millionaire," and the plot is a decidedly original one, quite out of the ordinary running. It is graphically told, and is certain to hold the interest of every reader, as the excitement is sustained throughout.

———

YOU will find on page 467, an announcement regarding the "Juggled Letters" Competition. **Your Editor.**

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The - - Maitland Millions.

Relating How a Girl Schemed for Wealth.

"If my grandson, Eric Maitland, should die before the age of twenty-one the estate shall revert to my nephew, Lionel Verner, and his heirs."

Sir Richard delivered the words with emphasis. In the quietness of the summer afternoon his voice carried far. Far enough, at all events, to reach his lady secretary. That young person paused half way up the staircase, then with some considerable care and agility retraced her steps, and took up her position—an indiscreet and uncomfortable one—at the keyhole of the library door. Inside Sir Richard was discussing the provisions of his will.

"It's no use, Paine," she heard the Baronet exclaim. "I've made up my mind. If anything happens to Eric, I should prefer that my sister's son should come after me, to the daughter of a scoundrel like Phillips. Yes, yes, I know what you're going to say," he interrupted testily, "that if Phillips was her father my poor daughter Triss was her mother. But her mother married against my will, and though both she and her scamp of a husband are dead, that's no reason why I should acknowledge their child. Once and for all, I will have nothing to do with her."

"Helen Phillips is entirely dependent on her own exertions," said the solicitor quietly.

"Well, put her down for a hundred pounds if you persist, and have done with the matter," Sir Richard replied impatiently.

The lawyer silently acquiesced, and the disposition of Sir Richard's property went on without further interruption.

Outside the door the private secretary was standing with flushed cheeks and eyes bright with excitement.

What she had heard was sufficient to make any girl excited!

She had just learnt that Lionel Verner, the man who for three years had been her persistent, if penniless, lover, was the nephew of a Baronet; and she had snubbed him unmercifully! Even kept from him the address of her present situation lest he should find courage—and the railway fare—to seek her out and renew his attentions.

To think that shabby young man should be the heir to a splendid place like Brayton Manor, and that he was head over ears in love with her. Why, it was the biggest piece of luck that could have happened. True, in their last interview she had forbidden Lionel to so much as think of her, but that was easily got over. A few soft words would bring him to her feet again, more enslaved than ever.

Already she saw herself mistress of Brayton Manor, with wealth and luxury at her command. Lionel's present poverty she ascribed to a difference of opinion with his uncle. Now she came to think of it, she remembered hearing Sir Richard allude to his nephew as "an ungrateful scamp."

Well, she must persuade Lionel to propitiate his uncle, and *then*——

Her daydreams were rudely interrupted.

"Miss Louis," said a childish voice, "I've been looking for you everywhere, will you take me for a walk?"

Eric looked eagerly up at her, and as Laura met his eyes all her castles toppled to the ground. She had forgotten—Lionel was only heir—"should my grandson die."

The words haunted her all the time she was dressing; they echoed in her ears. Her pen mechanically traced them on the paper when she tried to write, and it was only with a great effort that she put them out of her mind, and, giving all her faculties to the task, assured Lionel of her unalterable devotion, and her fixed determination to be true to him, in spite of poverty, for ever!

With a sigh she completed her preparations for the walk, picturing herself meanwhile in white satin, diamonds, and pearls, regretfully placing on her pretty head a sailor hat in lieu of the tiara, which in imagination she had fastened among her thick, dark braids.

It was a glorious afternoon, and, the letter safely posted, they turned towards the woods. Eric ran on in front to gather water lilies, and Laura returned to her visions of splendour and magnificence.

Hitherto her ambition had been set on charming the old Baronet into making her an offer of marriage. But at the best, she thought, the wife of a man of over seventy would be but another name for nurse; whereas married to Lionel, master of Brayton Manor, a very different future presented itself.

"Should my grandson die"—what was that scream, that cry that rang out shrill and piercing? Instinctively she hurried towards the lake where the child had been playing. He had stretched over the water to grasp a lily out of his reach, his foot had slipped, and now, his small hands clinging vainly to the branch of an overhanging tree, was in danger of sinking. Even as she looked the frail support gave way, and the child was struggling in the water.

There was no danger for a man or woman in the shallow pool, but Eric was under-sized for his age, and his feet did not nearly touch the bottom.

The girl took it all in with a flash of comprehension. The slender figure, the small, white face with its tremulous mouth and pleading eyes, the plaintive voice that called in an agony of childish wonderment—"Help me, oh, *please* help."

She saw it, understood it all. And stood motionless on the bank.

Another second and the child would not be there. Another second and Lionel, her lover, would inherit his uncle's wealth. And she could bid a long good-bye to the poverty and hardship that had soured her girlhood.

If only he would not look at her with such inquiring eyes. If only——

The child was young. He had no hold on life; it did not owe him years of happiness, she claimed.

And yet——

Would the child never drown?

Two small hands clutched wildly in the air, still grasping, poor little chap, the lilies that had cost him so dear.

The woman wavered, this last appeal touched even her hard heart. He should be saved.

Before she put her tardy resolution into practice, she was pushed roughly on one side. A young girl, flushed and panting, waded into the water, grasped the child, and carried him in safety to the bank.

"How could you stand there, letting him drown before your eyes?" she asked Laura indignantly. Then laying the boy upon the ground she commenced to chafe his hands.

"Are you a coward, or what?" she cried.

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But Laura was too stunned to answer or offer a defence. She stood on one side until at last the boy opened his eyes and drew a long deep breath.

Then the instinct of self-preservation reasserted itself. Snatching Eric in her arms, she motioned the girl out of her way.

"It was you that frightened him with your screams," she said. "Well," as the girl stared, too astonished to reply, "are you waiting to be paid for what you've done? Call up at the Manor, and I darcsay you'll be rewarded."

The listener's face flushed scarlet. Her pride was up in arms, but at the mention of the Manor she drew back, surprised almost—it seemed afraid.

"It is Eric Maitland?" she cried suddenly. "Oh, I must speak to him."

Would the child never drown!

Laura paid no attention to the words, however, but hastened on towards the Manor. The girl made no attempt to follow, but the recollection of the scorn, the accusation in her eyes, was hard for Laura Louis to endure. The child, already weighing down her arms, seemed to grow heavier at every step, and when at last she reached the house, in an uproar at Eric's absence, she was just able to put the boy in his uncle's arms, and then fell fainting on the floor.

She had no strength to suffer more.

"Is he any better, nurse?" Three times within the last half hour the poor old Baronet had made the same inquiry, and each time received the same sad answer, "No better."

It was three weeks since Eric's accident—for accident it was believed to be—and from then it had been a struggle between life and death for the boy, the issue now leaning to one side, now to the other.

Laura had taken to herself the credit of Eric's rescue, explaining that his foot had slipped, and that he had fallen into the water before she came to the spot. As the child was too ill to talk, her claim was undisputed, and she was regarded as his most devoted attendant.

When, therefore, in accordance with the doctor's directions, a trained nurse was sent for from the nearest town, Laura's indignation knew no bounds. "Could she not be trusted to nurse the child, whose life she had saved at the risk of her own?" she asked, and Sir Richard was hard put to it to quiet her.

She was prepared to treat the nurse as an interloper, and advanced to meet her with more than her usual air of insolence. But at the first sight of that fair, sweet face, at the sound of the rich, full voice, she started back frightened and amazed. In the quiet, self-possessed young girl who stood before her, she recognised the stranger who had saved Eric in the wood.

Perfectly polite, the nurse had behaved as if all recollection of their former meeting had vanished from her mind. What did she know—what did she suspect?

With the exception of the girl's reappearance, however, things were shaping themselves gradually to Laura's ends. Sir Richard had quite broken down since Eric was taken ill, and quietly acquiesced in Mr. Paine's suggestion that his nephew, Lionel Verner, should be sent for. And now Laura was waiting to receive him in the library, Sir Richard being unwilling to spare even a few moments from the child.

"How beautiful you are, my darling! how beautiful!" And Lionel bent to kiss the lovely face upturned to him.

But, the first joy of the meeting over, he grew quieter and more subdued, almost disturbed in his manner, and asked question after question about Eric, and Sir Richard, till Laura could have cried with vexation.

"Are you not pleased to see me?" she asked angrily.

He looked up, hurt and astonished. "You forget," he said coldly, "that little Eric is my cousin, and that I am anxious to know how he is."

And then, irritated by what she termed his stupidity, she made her first mistake. "You can't really want him to get better," she said, "for if Eric dies you will be Sir Richard's heir!"

She knew directly she had spoken that she had committed a grave error, and strove to banish the impression of her words by caresses and endearments; but he drew back from her touch and sternly asked her what she meant.

"How have you come by such a piece of information?" he said.

"Never mind!" she answered sullenly; "it *is* so, that's enough—if

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"I am your grand-daughter, and my name is Helen Phillips."

Eric dies you will be master of Brayton Manor, and I shall be its mistress."

He moved away with a feeling of repulsion, almost disgust.

"It is true," she repeated. "Eric will die and you——"

"Miss Louis, Mr. Verner, Sir Richard wants you at once. Poor little Eric is very ill!" The nurse spoke hurriedly, but it seemed to Laura that even in her agitation there was a touch of scorn in her voice.

The child was sitting up in bed, smiling at his grandfather in his old wistful fashion. But when Laura entered the smile faded, his eyes grew wild with fear and terror.

"The water!" he shrieked. "Take her away! The water—oh, the water!" and, noting the terror in the childish face, Lionel pushed her gently from the room and closed the door.

By ten o'clock that night it was all over. The little life had ended—finished. Lionel stole quietly from the room. Sir Richard stood gloomily by the window hidden by the curtains. Thinking herself alone, the nurse knelt down by the bedside and kissed the small, white cheek.

"My poor little one!" she cried. "My dear, dear little cousin!"

"Cousin!" Sir Richard started. "Who are you?" he asked her. "What is your name?" Unshrinkingly she met his look.

"I am your grand-daughter," she answered; "and my name is Helen Phillips."

The old man dropped wearily into a chair. "Life's a strange tangle!" he said—"a strange tangle."

When at last she came to say "Good-night," Sir Richard kissed her gently on the forehead.

"God bless you, my child!" he said. "God bless you!"

* * * * *

In the morning they found the old man sitting by Eric's bed, his hand clasping the little wasted fingers, his grey head lying beside Eric's golden curls. For the world-worn, weary wanderer, and the little child, had set out together on life's last sad journey, to the land of Death!

It was the evening after the funeral and the members of the household were assembled in the library of Brayton Manor to listen to Sir Richard's will. Laura's heart beat fast, and her cheeks flushed as John Paine quietly unfolded the document, and prepared to make public the terms of the legacies.

"Before I commence," he said, "I have a duty to perform. Both of you have, I think, heard of Sir Richard's grandchild, the daughter of Beatrice Maitland who married Robert Phillips. In deference to this lady's wishes, I have kept silence up to the present, but the time has now arrived when I must introduce Miss Helen Phillips."

The young nurse bowed quietly. Lionel impulsively stepped forward and took her hand.

"We must be friends, cousin," he said kindly.

"Where are your proofs?" interrupted Laura. "What grounds have you for supposing this woman to be other than an impostor? Are you mad, Lionel, to take things so much for granted?"

"Sir Richard acknowledged this lady as his grand-daughter in my presence the night before he died," interposed the solicitor, "when he also made a new will."

"I leave all my property to my nephew, Lionel Verner, provided he marries my grand-daughter, Helen Phillips. If he declines the said Helen Phillips shall inherit in his stead; if, however, she is unwilling, then Lionel Verner shall take possession of the whole, with a deduction of £2,000 for her benefit."

Laura sprang to her feet. "Infamous!" she cried. "Infamous! Sir Richard knew that Lionel and I were engaged. How dare he offer me such an insult!"

"I don't think my uncle quite understood, Laura," said Lionel quietly, "or he would not have introduced such a proviso. You must not think me lacking in courtesy, Helen," he said, smiling at the fair, fresh face, which crimsoned under his steady gaze, "but the Fates have already provided me with a charming *fiancée*," and he took Laura's hand within his arm.

"You forget, Lionel," she interrupted impatiently—"you forget; it is for Miss Phillips to decline to marry you. Otherwise you will not have a penny."

"Miss Louis is quite correct," interposed the solicitor; "if Miss Phillips is willing to accept you for a husband, and you decline, the property is hers."

"It seems that I am not to be spared a rejection," he said, laughing; "so, speak on, Helen, and say that you'll have none of me."

The girl raised her eyes, the flush in her cheeks deepened, and then paled as suddenly.

"Why don't you speak?" said Laura sharply. "Are you waiting to be asked? Perhaps Miss Phillips is anxious for the experience of a proposal," she sneered; "you'd better make it in due form, Lionel!"

Helen's eyes filled, her lips quivered, and in pity for her evident distress Lionel decided to bring matters to a close. Taking her hand in his, he asked her, smiling: "Helen, will you be my wife?"

For a moment she looked up at him—his firm, yet tender mouth, the steadfast, kindly eyes. Then, with a little catch in her voice, she answered: "Yes!"

"What did you say?" shrieked Laura. "Do you know he is going to marry me? You are beside yourself. You shall *not* have Lionel or his money!"

At that Helen's wrath burst out.

"I do not want a penny of the money. I do not even lay claim to it."

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"Are you so much in love with Lionel then?" sneered Laura.

"Take care," cried Helen—"take care, or you will try me too far! Ask your own heart, question your past, and you will find a key to this problem. Can you not guess?" she cried. "Can you not——"

"Helen!" cried Lionel quietly. "Helen!"

"Oh, forgive me!" she said, choking back her sobs—"forgive me! In time to come, cousin—in time to come—you may not think so strangely or so bitterly of me!"

"It's a vile conspiracy!" said Laura. "Can you say nothing, do nothing, Lionel?"

"There is nothing to be done," he answered sadly. "Come, darling!" he added, "we are young and strong, we can afford to brave poverty, my dearest, you and I."

"Poverty! I? I marry a man without a home—an income—*nothing?* You're a fool, Lionel, not to see through this minx! There's nothing left to do but to go to law and dispute the will."

"That I shall never do," he answered gravely. "Surely you cannot put the fear of poverty before the power of love? Think, dearest, but a little while ago you wrote to tell me nothing should ever part your heart from mine."

But she laughed derisively in answer. "Love!" she screamed; "it isn't in me! What should I, who have been fed upon poverty, know of love? It was money I wanted, not love. I have lied, stolen, cheated, heaped sin upon sin upon my soul, to gain that which I longed for, prayed for—wealth. And then, then, when the cup is at my lips, it is dashed upon the ground, and you—you talk of love!"

She was mad with rage and hate—mad to the point of murder. In her fury she seized a lighted lamp from a table standing near, seized it to throw at Helen. But passion blinded her eyes, clouded her judgment. The lamp fell crashing into splinters at her feet.

Her skirts aflame, her whole figure in a blaze, she dashed herself against the door, and before anyone could reach or touch her, rushed into the corridor. Faster and faster she sped down the passage, until her shrieks grew fainter, and then there was silence.

* * * * *

After Laura's awful death Lionel went abroad for over two years.

His return was unannounced and unexpected.

"I thought you'd made up your mind to settle out in Florida?" said John Paine, the solicitor. "What brings you back?"

"Curiosity," said Lionel. "I want to find out Helen's reason for acting as she did. Why did she say 'yes' to my offer of marriage? An offer made only in jest."

"Love—of money, perhaps," said the lawyer. "She did not want to lose the Maitland millions."

"Impossible! You tell me yourself she refuses to touch a penny of my uncle's money."

Paine glanced shrewdly at the young man.

"Why not ask her yourself?" he said.

"I can't. It would appear as if I reproached her for poor Laura's death."

The lawyer paused. Then he told him how Laura had heard of the will, and how she had contrived to let Eric drown Lionel, was thunderstruck.

Presently he roused himself and sent for his cousin. Love of Helen had drawn him back to England, love, and the hope that she returned it. Now the lawyer's story had destroyed much hope. It would be an insult to her to suggest it.

"I am leaving England, Helen," he said quickly, "but before I go I want to thank you for all you have done for me—how much I only knew to-day. I leave Brayton Manor in your hands, the property is yours."

Helen Phillips drew a little nearer and laid her hand upon her cousin's arm.

"Am I so very ugly?" she said, mischief in her eyes. "Oh, Lionel, Lionel, won't you take me and Brayton Manor too? I could not bear to lose you—or the Maitland millions."

But for answer Lionel kissed her.

John K. Prothero.

Juggled Letters Competition.

In this competition 139 competitors sent in absolutely correct lists, and in accordance with the conditions a further set of letters has been sent to them to decide in what order the prizes are to be awarded. The following is a list of the stations admitted as correct:—

1, Glasgow; 2, Belfast; 3, Oxford; 4, Liverpool; 5, Swansea; 6, Dublin; 7, Dover; 8, Portsmouth; 9, Leeds; 10, York; 11, Taplow; 12, Aberdeen; 13, Wigan; 14, Falkirk; 15, Mill Hill; 16, Perth; 17, Manchester; 18, Cwmbran; 19, Bradford; 20, Killarney; 21, Sheffield; 22, Holyhead; 23, Cork; 24, Yarmouth; 25, Exeter; 26, Brighton; 27, Norwich; 28, Carlisle; 29; Hereford; 30, Derby; 31, Leamington; 32, Killaloe; 33, Llandudno; 34, Inverness; 35, Salisbury; 36, Windermere; 37, Fenagh; 38, Bristol; 39, Margate; 40, Cynwyd; 41, Southampton; 42, Queenstown; 43, Arbroath; 44, Wakefield; 45, Glenfarg; 46, Richmond; 47, Balne; 48, Kildare; 49, Falmouth; 50, Tilbury; 51, Garngad; 52, Shrewsbury; 53, Paisley; 54, Limavady; 55, Morar, or Brora; 56, Leicester; 57, Greenock; 58, Cassillis; 59, Buncrana; 60, Sevenoaks; 61, Gretna; 62, Newport, Preston, or Prescot; 63, Hartlepool; 64, Brentor; 65, Salford; 66, Blantyre; 67. Hitchin; 68, Ventnor; 69, Eastbourne; 70, Ynysbwl, Wensley, or Swanley; 71, Dollar; 72, Tredegar; 73, Pembroke; 74, Farnham, Dearham, or Farcham; 75, Ballineen, Ebdon Lane, or Llandebie; 76, Manea; 77, Llanrhaiadr; 78, Holloway; 79, Croydon; 80, Stranraer; 81, Halewood, or Dawsholm; 82, Killybegs; 83, Walsall; 84, Uttoxeter; 85, Lairg, or Irlam; 86, Ystradowen; 87, Crook; 88, Friezland; 89, Achnasheen; 90, Brayton; 91, Smeaton, Stanhoe, Bentham, or Bensham; 92, Menheniot; 93, Hirwain; 94, Embsay, Seamer, or Ramsey; 95, Kirkcaldy; 96, Rhayader; 97, Lauder; 98, Eglwysbach; 99, Carrigans; 100, Balmoral; 101, Scrooby; 102, Hoghton; 103, Eskmeals 104, Belturbet; 105, Delgany; 106, Whauphill; 107, Findermore; 108, Yiewsley; 109, Whalley, Weyhill, or How Mill; 110, Invershin; 111, Pencoed, or Caledon; 112, Batley, Oakley, or Botley; 113, Treeton or Steeton; 114, Stalham, or Waltham; 115, Monikie; 116, Harrogate; 117, Gravesend; 118, Ystalyfera; 119, Carrowen; 120, Penzance; 121, Barlaston, or Darlaston; 122, Esplanade; 123, Rossington; 124, Delabole; 125, Aspatria; 126, Wenhaston; 127, Slateford; 128, Bullgill; 129, Golspie; 130, West Hoathly; 131, Flecknoe, Caerleon, or Greenock; 132, Muir of Ord; 133, Ulleskelf; 134, Ovoca; 135, Crianlarich; 136, Glossop; 137, Llanilar; 138, Warwick or Wickwar; 139, Kinaldie, Ilkeston, or Dinsdale; 140, Blackpool; 141, Healing, Cloghan, or Gilgach; 142, Loughrea, or Dolygaer; 143, Annaghilla; 144, Ferbane, Fencote, or Banteer.

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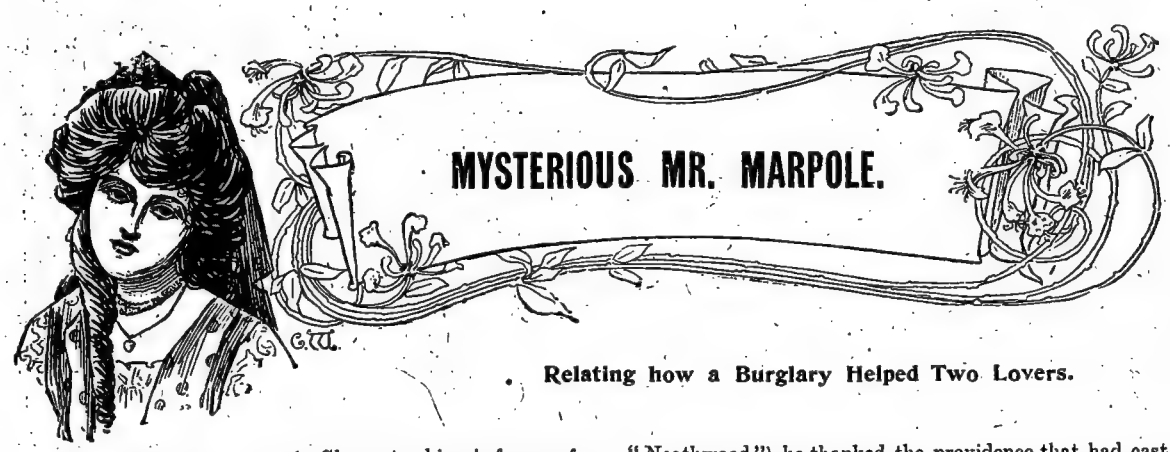

MYSTERIOUS MR. MARPOLE.

Relating how a Burglary Helped Two Lovers.

WOODLEIGH-UNDER-EDGE, in Gloucestershire, is famous for two things. One of these is its beauty, and the other is that it is the seat of Sir Herbert Wilcox, K.C.B.

"Neathwood" lies just off the main road to Bristol and is on an eminence commanding a magnificent view of the country round. Woodleigh Hill, on the side of which Woodleigh-under-Edge is perched, stands up at the end of a range of low hills, and on each side of it the beautiful undulating scenery can be seen for many miles.

Sir Herbert rejoiced in the possession of an exceedingly beautiful daughter of whom he was justly proud. Edith Wilcox was of medium height and a perfect figure. Great blue eyes shone beneath a white forehead in a shapely oval. Masses of curly brown hair which glinted golden in the sun surmounted her exquisite features. Small wonder is it that all the eligible young men in the countryside were in love with her.

But her love was already given, and her cousin, Charles Wilcox, son of Sir John Wilcox, of "Rattledown," in Wiltshire, was the fortunate possessor.

Sir Herbert Wilcox was, however, unaware of the state of affairs that existed between his nephew and his daughter. But the young people were quite decided, and had arranged everything, down to the pattern of the drawing-room carpet.

Charlie Wilcox spent half his time at "Neathwood," playing tennis, or boating on the river which runs through Kingswood. His father made him an ample allowance, besides which he had inherited a considerable sum from an uncle.

It was the evening before Edith's twenty-first birthday, and soon after that festival Charlie had made up his mind to speak to Sir Herbert, and to endeavour to get his consent to the engagement.

That evening Lady Bolton called in, full of the details of a burglary which had happened at her house some nights back.

"Yes," said this lady, "the men got in through the conservatory, and they've taken my diamond tiara, my diamond necklace, and a lot of things. I'm distracted, but the police say they've got a clue."

"What shall I do?" she rambled on. "The burglars ought to be hanged, indeed they ought."

Sir Herbert endeavoured to console her, but in a moment she had commenced again though this time on another tack.

"Oh, and what do you think? Why, a man has moved into Charford Hall, quite alone they say. I have found out his name is Marpole; but what can a single man want with that great place? I'm sure I don't know; he's something good-for-nothing, I'll be bound."

How often that is the case. When a man lives in seclusion and does not blare forth his doings and sayings to the world, they, whoever the estimable "they" may be, regard him with suspicious eyes.

Edith's twenty-first birthday dawned bright and sunny. As Charlie Wilcox looked out from his bedroom window over the fields to Woodleigh Hill (for he had stayed the night at "Neathwood."), he thanked the providence that had cast his life in such sunny places.

Suddenly he heard a commotion in the house, and looking down on to the terrace, he saw the butler, followed by two footmen, talking rapidly and gesticulating the while, emerge from the drawing-room door. They pointed to the ground and then went down the steps on to the lawn.

Leaning out of his window, Charlie called to them:

"Whatever is the matter?" he cried.

"Lor', Mr. Charles," the butler answered, "we've had burglars in during the night, and they've taken everything they could lay their hands on."

"One minute, and I'll be with you. You'd better call Sir Herbert, too."

Hastily completing his toilet, Charlie hurried downstairs, meeting Sir Herbert on the way.

It was easy to see where the thieves had got in, for the French window lock had been forced and the bolt filed through. The men had taken a lot of plate, a valuable picture had been cut from its frame, and various other articles were missing.

"The same gang that got into Lady Bolton's, I'll guarantee," said Sir Herbert.

They tried to trace which way the burglars had gone but found this beyond their powers. Eventually they gave up and Sir Herbert wired to Bristol for detectives. The Bristol force had already been endeavouring to trace the gang since the burglary at Lady Bolton's house.

"It's not the plate I mind so much, confound it," angrily said Sir Herbert. "It's the picture—it was an original Rubens. I'd give anything to get it back."

"You mean that, uncle?" said Charlie. The two men were alone in the great drawing-room which had been the scene of the burglary.

"Mean it? Why, of course I do," answered Sir Herbert, glancing curiously at Charlie.

"Well," said Charlie slowly, "let me strike a bargain with you. I love Edith, and she returns my love. I know you have views of her marrying Viscount Derwent, but I can assure you that Edith does not care a snap of the fingers for him. If I get back your picture will you give your consent to our engagement?"

Sir Herbert's brows contracted somewhat. It was true that he had thought otherwise for Edith, but if she cared for his nephew it would, no doubt, be as well to agree to Charlie's proposal.

"Very well," he said eventually; "it's a bargain."

The two men shook hands and then Sir Herbert went out of the room whilst Charlie sat and brought all his wits to bear on his self-imposed task.

For nearly an hour he sat thinking, and endeavouring to get out a plan of action. Suddenly he started to his feet.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "This mysterious man at

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Charwood Hall. What did Lady Bolton call him? Marpole, yes, that was it."

"That's your man, Charlie," he went on, still speaking his thoughts aloud. "Discover what you can about him for your first move."

After breakfast he met Edith in a secluded portion of the grounds. It was hardly by accident, I am afraid I must say.

"I've spoken to uncle, Edie," was almost the first thing Charlie said. The thoughtful reader will appreciate the use of the word "almost."

"Yes, Charlie. What did he say?"

"Well, if I can get the picture back for him that was stolen last night, he'll consent to our engagement. It seems almost like putting a price on your head, doesn't it, dear? But I am of the private opinion that he would give his consent anyhow."

"Do you think you'll be able to do it, dear?" anxiously queried Edith. "It will be clever of you."

"Well, I am going to have a jolly good try," responded her lover, with a determined look on his handsome countenance.

He commenced his task almost immediately by going down to Charwood Hall and surveying it. Presently he plucked up courage and entered the grounds. There was not a soul to be seen, so he returned to "Neathwood" again to find out some means of getting to know the lonely inhabitant of Charwood Hall. His desire was very quickly gratified without any trouble on his part, for, as he passed through the little wood in front of "Neathwood," his gaze alighted on the object of his thoughts.

Mr. Marpole was a stoutish-built man of average height. He had white hair and wore blue spectacles, and was, in fact, as mild looking a man as you would meet in a day's march.

When Charlie saw him, however, he was on his knees intently surveying the ground before him. Immediately Charlie's suspicions were awakened, and he dropped to the ground behind a bush to watch unseen the movements of his prey.

"Are you a geologist, too?" came Mr. Marpole's voice after a moment or two.

"How the dickens did he see me?" muttered Charlie to himself. He was somewhat chagrined for he imagined he was on a hot trail, and working in quite a Sherlock Holmes style.

"I have a very fine specimen of strata here," went on Mr. Marpole as Charlie came up to him. And then he went off with a long scientific explanation on the strata of the neighbourhood.

"Nothing but an old bore of a geologist," disconsolately thought Charlie, and then aloud he made some suitable reply, for he had gone through a course of geology at Cambridge.

Mr. Marpole seemed delighted with his new-found acquaintance and insisted on Charlie going back to Charwood Hall with him to lunch.

At the end of the day Charlie was no nearer the solution he desired, and in a rather disconsolate frame of mind he retired for the night.

Before he turned in he went up the turret stairs on to the roof to smoke a cigarette. It was a lovely night, and, after finishing his cigarette, he put on a pipe. Presently he heard twelve o'clock strike, and then he resolved to seek his bed.

Suddenly a form emerged from the trees and cautiously came up on to the terrace. With bated breath Charlie hid behind the coping and watched. It was Mr. Marpole, and immediately Charlie's suspicions were again aroused. The midnight visitor did not wait about long, but retraced his steps after a few moments. Hurriedly Charlie went downstairs, and out on to the terrace, then into the wood. But all trace of Mr. Marpole had vanished. Once more he returned to his coign of vantage on the roof, and closely watched the grounds beneath him.

Charwood Hall is visible from the position Charlie occupied, and presently he was mortified to observe a light in the room which he knew to be Mr. Marpole's bedroom. He stayed and watched until he heard two o'clock strike, and then he gave in and went to bed, the light still burning.

Not a word of his suspicions did he vouchsafe to anybody. But to Edith he remarked that he had a clue, and hoped soon to have some important information to give.

He began to assiduously cultivate Mr. Marpole's acquaintance, until he thought the time was ripe for action. Each night he had gone to bed late with the light still burning at Charwood Hall, until traces of his short nights began to be apparent on his face.

Edith commenced to worry at Charlie looking so ill, and even Sir Herbert remonstrated with him.

"Let it go, my boy," he said, "I shall not stand in your way with Edith."

But Charlie was obdurate, more especially as he seemed to be so close on the trail of the thieves.

"No, uncle," he said. "We've made a bargain, and I'll do my best to carry out my part."

He had thought out a scheme whereby he hoped to learn a little more of this mysterious Mr. Marpole.

At "Neathwood" he had stated that he was going back to "Rattledown" that night, and apparently had cycled off in that direction after dinner. It was only a twenty mile ride, so that the lateness of his start escaped comment.

Certainly he did cycle in the direction of "Rattledown," but when he had got past Wickbattle, a village about a mile and a half away, he turned sharply off the main road, and took a direction which eventually brought him over the common to near Charwood Hall.

The hour was only half-past nine, and as he did not propose to commence work until twelve o'clock, he did not wish to be seen in the vicinity. He lifted his bicycle into a field, and then climbed over himself.

So he sat and waited; never had hours passed so slowly. But at last it turned a quarter to twelve, and then, with a sigh, he deliberately punctured his bicycle.

Slowly he wheeled his machine down the road and into the grounds of Charwood Hall. With a little grunt of satisfaction he observed that the light was still burning.

Charwood Hall had been built by a retired Indian colonel, and was of the bungalow type. Thus Mr. Marpole's sleeping apartment, where the light was burning, was on the ground floor.

Cautiously Charlie crept along, having left his bicycle by the front door. Suddenly his foot caught in something, and with a tremendous crash he fell to the ground. As he fell a bell jangled loudly inside the house, and at the same time he caught a glimpse of a face at the window. It was Mr. Marpole's, but without the blue spectacles, and in that telegraphic view Charlie observed the eyes, and saw, to all intents and purposes, that they were as good as his own. Then why the spectacles, unless as a disguise?

By this time Mr. Marpole was at the door, and a light was streaming out into the pathway.

"Hullo!" he cried. "Who's there?"

"It is I, Charlie Wilcox. My bicycle is punctured and as it was so late and I saw a light burning, I came to ask hospitality. I was going to tap at your window, when I fell over and made all that row."

"Come in, my dear fellow," cried Mr. Marpole heartily, as he returned a revolver to his pocket. "You fell into one of

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my little burglar traps; I have to be prepared for the gentry. I hope you did not hurt yourself?"

"Oh, no," hastily replied Charlie, who noticed that Mr. Marpole now had the blue glasses on again.

"Wheel your bicycle into the hall and come in. Have you dined?"

"Oh, yes, thank you. If you give me a bed it is all I want. I am very sorry to trouble you like this."

"Trouble?" cried Mr. Marpole. "Not at all, I'm only too delighted to have company."

He lit a lamp in a living room, and produced a box of cigars, but Charlie excused himself on the plea of fatigue.

His bedroom was in the same corridor as his host's room, and Charlie sat cudgelling his brains for some pretext of getting about the house, for he was convinced that Mr. Marpole was in some way connected with the burglars.

"Got it," he suddenly muttered, and then rapidly undressing, he donned the suit of pyjamas put out for him.

He waited for half an hour, and then undoing the door, he crept down the corridor to his host's room. He rapidly turned the handle and gazing striaght before him with a fixed, staring look in his eyes, as that of a somnambulist, he entered the room.

Before Mr. Marpole turned round Charlie caught sight of a diamond necklace, and then the hurried movement of his host caused him to return to his fixed stare.

Slowly he walked round the room, and stood gazing out of the window. His nerves were strained to their utmost, and he felt he could not keep it up much longer, and was half inclined to turn and grapple with Marpole. For some little time he stared out of the window and then, turning slowly, walked across the room, meeting the steely gaze of his host, who was fingering a revolver, without flinching.

The tension was tremendous, and now he was anxious to get away as quickly as possible from his trying situation.

"Mind that stool in your way," suddenly came the voice of Mr. Marpole.

Instinctively Charlie glanced to the floor, though only for a second, but that second was all sufficient.

"Exactly as I suspected, Mr. Wilcox," said Marpole, as he stood between his visitor and the door. "I know you have been spying on me. Do you think your overtures of friendship have blinded me? Do you think I did not see through your thin artifice to-night, first the puncture, and then the sleep-walking.

"Now, Mr. Wilcox, the game is up, so please sit down, and we'll talk over matters," continued Mr. Marpole, whilst he toyed suggestively with his revolver.

Charlie recognised that he was discovered, and, deeming it best to give into his captor, he sat down with a defiant expression on his face.

"You've been fairly clever, I admit, and I suppose you now imagine that you've run down the burglars in their haunt."

Charlie nodded.

"Well, I suppose nine hundred and ninety-nine people out of a thousand would come to the same conclusion. Just wait a moment, but don't try any fancy tricks whilst my back is turned as I can see you quite well in the mirror."

When he turned round again, Charlie gasped with astonishment. This was not Mr. Marpole; the white hair and glasses were gone, and the features entirely altered.

"What the dickens?" muttered Charlie.

"Permit me to introduce myself. John Hardcastle, at your service."

"What?" shrieked Charlie, "why, you're 'Smiling Jack.' Well, I'll be——" He relapsed into an astonished stare.

"I believe they do call me 'Smiling Jack.' I'm glad you recognise me or it might have been awkward," genially responded Marpole, or Hardcastle, to be correct.

John Hardcastle, known as "Smiling Jack," was the leading detective of the London force. His name and photo were often seen in the papers, for he had been responsible for many smart captures.

"But I thought——" began Charlie, in bewilderment.

"Exactly," said Hardcastle, cutting him short, "I thought you did. No, my friend, as you see my connection with the burglars is somewhat different."

"But Lady Bolton's diamonds?"

"Quite so—but confidence for confidence. Why are you so anxious to discover the thieves?"

"Why—er—because they've got away with uncle's picture and plate."

"Is that all?"

Charlie became a little embarrassed, and coughed slightly to give him time to think. Then he decided to make a clean breast of it all to the detective. When he had finished Hardcastle smiled encouragingly at him.

"Quite romantic, isn't it?"

"Think so?" muttered Charlie disconsolately. "But you will upset it all. Now I shall not have a chance to carry out my scheme."

"I don't see that exactly," said Hardcastle. "There's no reason why you shouldn't play a leading part in the discovery."

"What?" cried Charlie. "You mean you will help me? By Jove! you are a good chap."

Hardcastle smiled and looked at his watch.

"We've still half an hour before we start," he said.

"Half an hour before we start?" Charlie repeated in a mystified tone.

"Yes, my boy, now listen." Then "Smiling Jack" told Charlie how he had got on the track of the thieves. How he had discovered the hiding place for their loot preparatory to taking it to London. How, a few hours ago he had gone and transported it to Charwood Hall, and how he intended to capture the burglars that same morning at Lovell Court.

"They are quite a common or garden crowd," he said. "I had not the slightest difficulty in tracing them. At two o'clock this morning they are to break into Lovell Court, Lord John Lovell's place, and there they will fall into our hands. I've got the police ready, and you and I will have the credit of it."

"I?" cried Charlie. "But I've had nothing to do with it!"

"Well, my boy, you traced the stolen property, didn't you? Now you might as well finish off the job by helping to capture the burglars, see?"

Charlie saw, and was profuse in his thanks to John Hardcastle.

By seven o'clock the police with their prisoners were in the train bound for Bristol. Charlie stood on Charwood station to see them off.

"Good-bye," said "Smiling Jack" as they gripped hands. "You've got a pleasant morning before you." He referred to the picture which Charlie carried, and which by a special act of courtesy he was allowed to retain.

"Good-bye, Mr. Hardcastle. Thanks ever so much for all you have done for me. You'll come down and see me sometimes, won't you?"

"As a geologist, eh?" laughingly cried Mr. Hardcastle, "with a mirror which helps me to see out of my back?"

Charlie strolled into "Neathwood" as they were sitting down to breakfast. They were not surprised to see him again so soon, as he rode over at all hours.

"Morning, uncle, and everybody," he said. "By the way, uncle, you'd better get a man down to put the picture in." He spoke with a great air of *sang froid*, and handed the picture to his uncle in a nonchalant way.

"What!" almost screamed Sir Herbert Wilcox, whilst all present indulged in astonished exclamations.

"Come and shake hands, my boy, I'm proud of you. I've got an announcement to make," said Sir Herbert, "that is, these young people, my nephew and my daughter, have made up their minds to marry each other, and now await your congratulations."

Edith blushed vividly as Charlie turned and in front of them all deliberately kissed her.

E. Newton Bungey.

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Engagement Not Announced.

LORD DUFFER: "You're a girl after my heart." Miss Price: "And you're a man after my money."

Would Come as a Shocker.

MISS THIRTYODD: "I want to give my *fiancé* a surprise on his birthday. Can't you suggest something?" Miss de Flypp: "Well, you might tell him your age."

Would Use Them as Object Lessons.

WIFE: "You haven't used any of those cigars I bought for you." Husband: "No, I am keeping them for Tommy when he wants to learn to smoke."

And They Struck!

HE: "I suppose you are aware of the tender feeling I have for you?" She: "No; I'm quite in the dark." He: "That being the case permit me to suggest that we strike a match."

Where They Are Similar.

FINNICK: "If you notice, the poets invariably refer to the earth as 'she.' Why should the earth be considered feminine, I'd like to know?" Sinnick: "Why not? Nobody knows just how old the earth is."

Insult to Injury.

"BRIDGET," said Mrs. Hyflyte, "your lady friend mustn't stay so late again. Her uproarious laughter woke me up at one o'clock this morning." "Yes, mum; I was tellin' her about how you tried to make a cake one day."

Farming Extraordinary.

MABEL: "There's Mr. Stubbs. He's the only farmer on record who has made his money out of weeds." George: "He surely didn't do that?" Mabel: "Yes, he did." George: "How, pray?" Mabel: "He married a widow."

Sweet Tempered Man!

WIFE: "You do not speak to me as affectionately as you used to, George. I think you have ceased to love me." Husband: "There you are again! Ceased to love you! Why, I love you better than my life. Now shut up and let me read my paper."

Hubby Suspected a Visitor.

MOTHER: "You say your husband no longer spends his evenings at the club." Daughter: "I soon broke him off that." Mother: "How did you manage?" Daughter: "Before going to bed I put two easy chairs close together by the parlour fire, and then held a match to a cigar until the room got a faint odour of smoke."

He Got Rather Muddled.

HE: "I trust you have forgiven me for not recalling your name the other evening, although I remembered your face perfectly." She: "Oh, yes; but my name is such a plain one I should think you would have remembered it quite as readily." He: "Not at all; your name isn't half as plain as—er—beg pardon; your face is much more aristocratic than your—I mean to say that your name is harder than——"

Unselfish Man.

THE BRIDE (on the honeymoon): "Why, you only bought one ticket, dear!" The Groom: "By Jove! I never thought of myself."

More Pierpont-Morganism.

"GRANDPA, what is a morganatic marriage?" "A morganatic marriage? H'm! That must be a marriage for money."

Sensation Extraordinary.

HUSBAND: "I am just in the mood for something sensational and startling—something that will make my hair stand on end." Wife: "Here is my last milliner's bill." His hair stood!

The Banns are Published.

ADA (pensively): "I hope you'll invite me to the wedding when you get married." Jack (boldly): "I'll invite you before I ask anyone else, and if you don't accept there won't be any wedding."

On the Instalment System.

MOTHER: "I am afraid Mr. Crisscross is not serious in his attentions." Daughter: "Oh, he's very bashful, you know; he's offering himself by pieces. Last night he wanted me to take his arm."

How They Do Things Now.

GLADYS: "If she doesn't love him, why does she encourage him?" Edith: "Well, she's hoping her father will suspect she loves him, and send her on a trip to the Continent to overcome her infatuation!"

She Did Not Study Astronomy.

SHE: "And you say you can tell by the stars if he loves you? Why, I didn't know that you ever scanned the skies." Belle: "I don't; but I scan his love letters. He is one of those fellows that marks a star for every kiss."

Nice and Roomy.

MRS DE STYLE: "Oh, John, please buy me that drum! I know you can get it cheap." Mr. de Style (dumfounded): "Gracious, what in the world do you want a bass drum for?" Mrs. de Style: "Why, it will make such a splendid box for my theatre hat."

Alas! Too True!

A LECTURER on optics, in explaining the mechanism of the organ of vision, remarked: "Let any man gaze closely into his wife's eye, and he will see himself looking so exceedingly small that——" Here the lecturer's voice was drowned by shouts of laughter.

And the Echo Answers "Why?"

FIRST COUSIN: "It is annoying that our names are the same. You often get my letters, and I often get yours." Second ditto (sweetly, but insinuatingly): "Well, why don't you ask your friends to put 'senior' after your name, when they address letters to you?"

Just Fancy!

SUE: "Blanche had an awfully embarrassing experience at the theatre last night. Her hair came down!" Nell: "How excessively annoying." Sue: "But that wasn't the worst of it. It rolled under the seats, and was only recovered after a good deal of trouble, and then you can fancy what a condition it was in."

At His Own Expense.

MR. BLUFF: "Look here, young man, you're always going about with my daughter, and I want to know what your intentions are regarding her?" Young Man: "I really have no intentions, sir." Mr. Bluff (angrily): "Then what do you mean by amusing yourself at my daughter's expense?" Young Man: "I'm not amusing myself at your daughter's expense, sir, but at my own expense. I always pay for the theatre tickets and refreshments."

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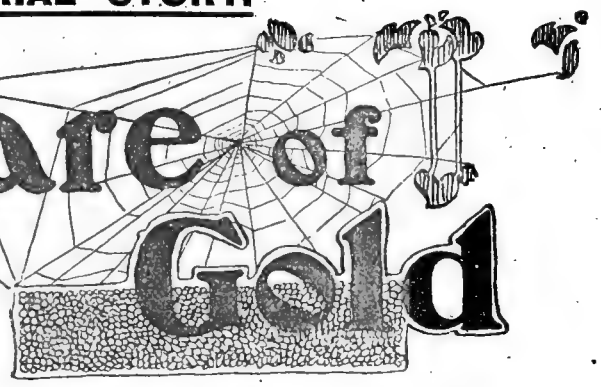
GRAND SERIAL STORY.

The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

By

Henry T. Johnson.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS SPLENDID STORY ARE:

George Geldart, a former prosperous City merchant, supposed to be dead, and now known as "Old Mystery."

Eric Geldart, his elder son, who conspired to kill his father, thereby coming into his property. He then enters Parliament, where he forms a new party.

Ronald Geldart, the younger son, who has been disinherited because he has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

Clare Armitage, the adopted sister of the two brothers, and who was betrothed to Eric, who now scorns her love.

Boanerges Blagdon, the traitorous partner of old Geldart, whom he has cheated in business, and who plots with Eric to murder him.

Sampson Scrimshaw, company promoter, who befriends "Old Mystery," by whose assistance he is successful in endeavouring to become an M.P.

Mr. Stanyer, an Australian financier, who gives "Old Mystery" the post of English agent for his business.

Madeleine Lorraine, daughter of Lord Lynton, who is beloved by Eric, but who loves "Harvey Bligh," the popular author, really Ronald Geldart.

Phyllis Daventry, typewriter to Scrimshaw, who takes a fancy to "Old Mystery." She is rescued from Hooligans by Ronald Geldart.

Jack Widdicombe, cousin to the brothers Geldart, and who occupies a responsible position on the *Meteor*.

TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

Ronald Learns the Truth.

Hailing another cab, Clare drove to Little Turnstile, and there alighting, walked through into Lincoln's Inn Fields.

She was late and hurried along, fearing Ronald might not have waited, and in her haste and anxiety not observing through the falling mist that she was being followed.

She crossed the wide road and hurried along by the railings. Turning the corner of the square, she still further quickened her pace, for there on the opposite side of the road she made out through the murky vapour a tall, well-knit form, clad in a light ulster, pacing to and fro. Swiftly going over to him, and extending both hands, she exclaimed:

"Ronald, I was so afraid you would not wait. Fate seemed to be conspiring to prevent my getting here in time."

"Clare," he said compassionately, "you are white and trembling with cold."

"Not with cold, Ronald, with fear; my heart is full of a thousand fears."

"What is there to harm you?"

"I don't know, I can't tell. Most of all I was afraid something was going to happen to prevent my meeting you and saying what I have to say."

"Let us walk round to the hotel there, Clare, it is chilly for you here."

"No, no! I want to say what I must say here and now. Ronald, listen to me, but don't look at me, I couldn't bear your eyes upon me while I am telling you the awful, wicked truth."

And then, pacing to and fro along the pavement of the deserted square, along by the railings of the stone-paved courtyards to the quaint, gloomy old houses, once the mansions of nobility, now the storehouses of their title deeds and haunts of their legal advisers, Clare told Ronald Geldart the appalling story of her treachery towards him, how she had abstracted the notes and cheques from his father's desk and planted certain of them in his room in the pockets of one of his jackets, and how she had conspired with Eric, his traitor brother, to turn his father's heart against him, and fix upon his character and name a foul, unjust, indelible suspicion.

Ronald listened with horror in his heart, horror that a fellow creature, let alone his own blood brother, could so forget all ties of blood, could even dream of, let alone devise and carry out, a villainy so monstrous.

That Eric had lied about him to his father, had done all in his power to embitter that father's heart against him, he from the first had known, although he had no means of proving it, but even at his worst he had not deemed his brother quite so black as in the light of truth he proved to be.

As for the woman by his side, the ingrate whom he in other days had loved and reverenced as child companion, as friend, of his boyhood and his youth, almost as a sister, it passed all bounds of wonderment how she could have requited his belief in her, respect for her, by malice so envenomed. And she, pacing at his side with hands clasped and eyes cast down, seemed to read the workings of his heart, for she wailed in anguish.

"Ronald, Ronald, what have you to say to me? What are you thinking of me? You were always so gentle and so kind to me, my playmate as a child, my protector and defender in my girlhood, my almost brother, my more than brother. Oh, Ronald, when you are thinking the very, very worst of me, remember that it wasn't Clare, it was a poor, weak, hypnotised, resistless creature, helpless in his hands, resistless to his will. Oh, God! I could throw myself down here upon the stones and beg of you to trample me beneath your feet, to spurn me with your heel."

They walked along in silence, a silence broken only by her sobs. At last he stopped and turned.

"Good-bye, Clare, I will leave you now. I don't know what to say or what to think."

"But, Ronald, what is to be done to clear your name, to bring the guilty ones to justice?"

"I don't know—I don't know. Even now it seems to me you are speaking out the truth not so much to clear the right as to avenge yourself on the wrong-doer who has been false to you. Clare! Clare! let me put you into a cab and leave you, then I'll try and think out what is to be done. It's gone so far, the evil that you've done, that there's no knowing if it ever can

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be quite undone. You knew the workings and the windings and the mischief of a lie. It is cast upon the air like an evil germ or like the breath of a disease. None know whither it may wend its evil way; it may be met and killed, or it may not, but who can call it back?"

"But, Ronald, you must meet the lion and kill it, and I will aid you. Oh, believe me, I do repent. I've been haunted by the memory of my sin by night and day. Oh, Ronald, Ronald!" she hushed her voice into a whisper, "believe me, at times I do believe your father's restless spirit has faced me to reproach me with my sin, for since he died I can almost swear that I have looked and met the gaze of his accusing eyes."

"But you must see," said Ronald, "that you have no simple task to right the wrong you wrought so easily. It must be palpable to you that, were you now to rally to my side and speak the truth to all the world, you must ere long be ranged before the world beside your partner and accessory in crime—your partner, I should say between your partners.

"Clare Armitage, to undo the evil you have done me would be to risk the standing in a prison dock beside my father's unctuous traitor partner, Blagdon, the smug, suave pillar of respectability, the bulwark of and the warden of his church—the man who, with his oily, treacherous smile, fat and sleek with evil gains, snug in the garnered harvest of his black and base rascality, tells little children that it is a sin to steal and lie, and that if they are good they will be happy, and bids the little innocents beware of the snare of gold. With that man on your right hand and on the other my brother Judas."

"Ronald! Ronald!" the anguished girl cried in a frenzy of contrition, despair, remorse, "all this, all this I will do, all this I will risk, all the penalties of the law that I deserve I will undergo if I can undo my sin." Then in a gentler voice and with a kindly hand upon her shoulder he said:

"Clare! Clare! you must think, we both must think what is best to be done—for both our sakes! I cannot let you sacrifice yourself altogether. I can understand that it was not the promptings of your heart that made you do these wicked things. The memory of the old days pleads for you in my heart. Go now, Clare, and perhaps there may be another way; perhaps you can write it all down and sign it before credible, reliable witnesses. Having done your best to undo the wrong, you may for a while withdraw beyond the pale of the laws that you have outraged. Now let us part to think things over."

"Ronald!" she wailed. "God bless you for speaking to me in that strain. Your kindness smites me harder than any words of anger or scorn. God bless you, Ronald. Good-bye, good-bye, until we meet again."

"Until we meet again," he said, hastening away, and little recking that ere they met again life for one of them would have merged into eternity, and the river would have met the ocean.

He disappeared in the gloom, and Clare retraced her steps, re-crossing the road towards the railings of the grassy, thickly-timbered square; something meantime whispering in her heart: "Don't go that way, you are alone"; and oppressed by this troublous sense of impending peril, she quickened her steps, and in her gathering panic almost ran along the greasy pavement.

And a cry broke in her throat as through the murky mist a form approached her, a hand was laid upon her arm.

"Who is it?" she cried. "Why—it's Eric! Oh, I was so frightened!" and all her alarm vanished. But alarm gave place to pain, so rough and ruthless was that grip upon her shoulder.

"Eric!" she pleaded, "don't—don't, you're hurting my arm. Eric, dear Eric, why are you looking at me like that?"

"You she-cat! You fiend! So you've kept your word, you've carried out your threat. You will have it—then take it!"

His right hand poised itself behind his head and fell with a heavy blow upon her heart.

"Oh, Eric, to think that you should strike me!" for she

(*Continued overleaf.*)

DISTRESSING FATNESS AND ITS CURE.

IT is an extraordinary fact that thousands of men and women go on month after month and year after year carrying a burden of superfluous fat, a burden often unsightly and always more or less distressing, without taking any whole-hearted measures to rid themselves once and for all of the incubus. Others, perhaps less excusable still, undergo all kinds of weakening methods involving semi-starvation, the excessive use of cathartics, dangerous drugging and other evils, without any permanent benefit in the way of destroying the tendency to get stout, but with, too frequently, a disastrous effect upon the constitution. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred as soon as these health-destroying methods are dropped the fat forms again with redoubled persistence, notwithstanding the fact that the subject is obviously enfeebled in general health and vitality. The thousands of persons who have gone through any of these painful processes, and who have finally turned to the famous "Russell" treatment—the one scientific, rational, and permanent cure for excessive stoutness—are unanimous in their grateful acknowledgment of its marvellous effects, both as to radical cure of obesity and wonderful strength-giving powers. The "Russell" treatment not only eliminates from the system all superabundant fatty deposits, both internal and subcutaneous, but tones up the jaded system, promotes appetite, assists digestion and assimilation, and builds up health and nervous vigour and muscular strength by sheer force of increased nutrition. Its fat-eliminating powers are evident from the very first; for within twenty-four hours of adopting the treatment there is a decrease of weight varying from ½lb. to 2lb., according to the individual case. In cases of extreme obesity the decrease is considerably more, and sometimes approaches 4lbs. After the initial decrease indicated there is a consistent daily reduction while the treatment is followed, and with the ultimate certain attainment of normal proportions, the *régime* may be abandoned without fear of a relapse. The reduction is proportionate over the entire surface of the body, with the result that beautiful facial lines are as surely regained as correct abdominal girth. The muscles become firm, the skin clear, the complexion roseate, the bearing alert and graceful. After a complete course of "Russell" the patient is veritably a new being. The recipe of the principal preparation employed is given in "Corpulency and the Cure" (see note below), the standard work on the causes and the cure of corpulency. This compound is a harmless, pleasant-tasting liquid, of purely vegetable ingredients, and its grand tonic properties are such that it could have none but the best effects upon the most delicate constitution. A perusal of "Corpulency and the Cure," which contains information and advice of the highest value to stout persons, as well as a thousand extracts from letters of persons of both sexes who certify to the permanent beneficial effects of the "Russell" treatment, is most earnestly recommended. The address is given below.

STANDARD BOOK FREE.

On receipt of three penny stamps to defray postage under plain sealed envelope, &c., Mr. F. Cecil Russell, Woburn House, 27 Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., will be pleased to forward to all readers of "Short Stories," a gratis copy of his authoritative work, "Corpulency and the Cure" (256 pages 8vo). It contains the most exhaustive information on the causes and cure of obesity, besides a thousand testimonials from the author's patients, and as many extracts from the Press.

All communications treated as strictly private.

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only felt the dull pain and shame of the blow of his clenched hand—not the sting of what was in it—for a while.

But he raised that cruel hand again, gripped her throat within his elbow, forcing her backwards across his knee, and in the dim glimmer of a lamp above she saw that hand upraised again, a something glittering in it and daubed with a crimson splash.

"Eric! What are you doing! Oh, Eric, for—God's sake, don't stain your soul—not for my sake, but for yours, my dear. Don't—don't!"

But the red, remorseless hand came down again, a sob bubbled up in her throat, a sickly numbing faintness followed the shock of that twice murderous stab.

Heavy and inert she lay back in his arms. Brutal villain that he was, he let her fall upon the stones, looked close into her face, placed his cheek against the mouth he so often had kissed with lies of love eternal, this time to make sure she had ceased to breathe.

The teeth were clenched, the jaws were set and rigid, the eyes were closing.

"God—forgive!" With one heave of her lacerated bosom she sighed, a shudder thrilled her, her head fell back, leaving her chin, hard and cold as marble, upwards.

"She is quite safe now," he said. Swayed by a sudden impulse he kissed her—then left her.

Ere he had gone a dozen yards another form loomed through the mist.

"Eric! What have you done?" Blagdon, now a quaking jelly of a man, quavered. "Where is she? What has happened to her? Why have you left her so soon? What is she going to do? Eric! For God's sake, tell me, what have you done? You haven't—oh! you haven't——" He could not frame the word to clench his sentence—but he knew that Eric had.

Whining and whimpering, he hurried along beside him till they reached a fountain, and there the younger man, filling the cup, poured it over his hands, laved them, rinsed them again and again, washing away in that crystal spring the stain that not all the ocean could cleanse from his soul.

Wiping and drying his hands upon a handkerchief, he strode along towards Little Turnstile, his elder, but less desperate, villain comrade at his elbow.

As they neared the north side of the square a man crossed their path some yards ahead, and was lost in the deepening gloom, but ere the view of him was lost for a moment a glimmering ray fell on his face and the two ruffians clutched each other's arms.

"My God, Blagdon, did you see that face?"

"I thought I saw it, Eric, but it couldn't have been. My eyes were playing tricks. Oh, tell me, what was it that you saw?"

And Eric Geldart, M.P., thief, and murderer, replied:

"I saw the face and form of my dead father!"

TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

Springle Gets into Difficulties.

The topics at this particular period occupying most public attention were the fixtures for the opening football and the closing racing season, the latest play, and the doings of Sampson Scrimshaw, M.P.

Opening your morning paper you were met with interesting columns as to the plans of the "genial and able manager," the migration from Slagton to Stockham of Punter and the trial of the Cambridgeshire crack.

Turning to another sheet you would read something like this: GIGANTIC CITY DEAL. MAMMOTH TRANSACTION BY THE MULTI-MILLIONAIRE M.P.

For, although the world had not guessed the secret of the System so elaborately planned and manipulated, thought out by Old Mystery, and worked out by him in conjunction with Sampson Scrimshaw, the world could not help knowing, and Scrimshaw cared nothing that it knew, of the big deals he made as the outcome of that System, and the magnificent margin of profit resulting to him in connection therewith.

Scarcely a day passed without some startling movement in the financial field by this new Napoleon, who bought up at twenty-four hours' notice the enterprises and corporations of big firms, industrial and commercial, amalgamating some, separating and developing others, and in all operations displaying skilled insight and foresight, garnering in to his own credit tens of thousands, where others had despaired of even thousands. Newly-acquired enterprises flourished more vigorously than ever, and Scrimshaw's fortunes grew and grew.

"Mystery," said Scrimshaw, "we shall be worth more money than we know what to do with. If people only knew."

"But they don't know, they mustn't know, else our chance of going on piling it up is gone for ever."

"But why go on piling it up? I've enough to live in ducal style on for all my days, and you—what you're doing with it, goodness knows; hardly anybody knows even where you live. What do you do with all the money you're making?"

"Count it," said Old Mystery. "There's always that pleasure when you've money, when you've bought all you want to buy, and there's nothing you want to acquire, and nobody you want to bribe. You can count—count—count—it's like wine, to have a big total all your own."

Financier as he was to the tips of his fingers, Scrimshaw turned, oppressed by a creepy feeling, from this old man with the cavernous eyes, who, living the life of a nameless drudge, he knew to have amassed with him hundreds of thousands.

"But then the time will come for you to die, and who have you to leave it to? No kith or kin?"

"To wrangle over it?" returned Old Mystery; then in an altered tone: "How do you know?"

"I don't know; you're simply to me from beginning to end a mystery; a master of finance with more genius for money making than any man I've ever met—but you're a mystery. Well, by-bye. I'm going to dine at the Carlton; then I've a box at the Empire; ladies, Mystery, and real swagger ones too, one a marchioness and the other a Mrs., with a name as old as any title in the country, and they like the Empire best of all the shows, because they won't stand preaching and teaching; and then a supper at the Savoy to wind up with.

"My boy, I'm making my pile to spend it. I mean to live my life. You can go on counting—counting, if you like. But, by the bye, old man, its hardly safe to keep those notes and bonds in a crazy old hutch like this. Why not put them in the bank?"

"They're just as safe here," laughed the old man. "Mr. Bill Sykes might make a dash for the Cosmopolitan Trust; he wouldn't think of wasting time on poor Old Mystery's bare, furnished den. Good night."

Scrimshaw was already half-way down the stairs, and the man left alone, unlocking boxes and drawers, took out rolls of notes and gold and placed them upon the table in a heap, a gigantic heap, if measured by their intrinsic value.

And so he went through them, turning over the crisp notes, coupons, share certificates, and bonds, and adding them up in hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, mere heaps and handfuls of paper, with no chink or glitter about them, only a low, sibilant rustle, as though the secret of their wealth was only to be spoken in a whisper, marked with quaint designs and intricacies of the engraver's art.

But light and flimsy as they were, they were deeds of title vesting in their holder interests in mighty enterprises near and far, unanswerable demands on wealthy corporations for their gold. And all the outcome of the System—that Eric, with his infernal supercilious airs, his affectation of superior intellect, which Blagdon, with his almost boastful disavowal of intellectual gifts, his arrogance of stupidity, had scoffed at.

There was the result, tangible, complete, an accomplished fact, and Eric and Blagdon themselves entangled in the

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toils of finance, enmeshed in Scrimshaw's Snare of Gold, the snare that, though they knew it not, he, Old Mystery himself, had helped to set and to manipulate.

Then he reflected on Scrimshaw's words. What was to be the end of it?

He had set himself to do this thing, had proved his System infallible, here was the proof; and now in his heart of hearts he was wearying of the double life, the sequel, as it were, to the life that had been; was longing to rehabilitate himself in his habit as he lived of old.

He had taught Eric a hard and bitter lesson, had proved Blagdon a blatant fraud. Now it was in his power to demand of Eric his brother's rehabilitation—then he would forgive. It was time now to lift from Ronald the burden of unjust suspicion, and face him out in the light of day, the soul of honour, tried and true as steel.

Someone else was staying late that night.

In the office downstairs Horace Springle pored over the cash account and the cash books, the contents of which evinced no more disposition to agree than oil and vinegar or two cats of the Kilkenny breed.

Horace Springle gazed with stolid despair at the column of figures in the cash book and at the total, and thence at the contents of the cash box, the gulf between which seemed every moment to divide.

How was that gulf to be bridged, for the day of reckoning was at hand. On the morrow he had to present for verification his periodical account, that account which showed so serious a balance against him—a balance that had increased with every effort to replace it.

For Horace in his way had gone the pace, and the luxury had proved an expensive one. Fast living had meant speedy insolvency, and in the hope of replenishing he had backed his fancy, and his fancy had broken its backer.

Then, "to get his own back," he had made that fatal and unhappily frequent error, had used the funds of others, the moneys entrusted to him by his employer, and, these having gone, in yet more frantic efforts, had staked still heavier sums, making still further deficits. And now he stood face to face with the alternative of flight or exposure.

What would they say at Bloomsbury Square? How Grimmage would sneer and how Mrs. Skimper would throw up her hands! And what would they say at the halls, the "boys," the old pals and the "duckies," to win whose boisterous regard he had first ventured into troubled waters?

What was there to be done? Only one thing seemed possible. A further slip down the slanting path, closer to the precipice beyond, a further inroad depletion. Yes, the absolute emptying of that cash-box—and then—flight, and trusting to luck!

Hark! With guilty start he clutched the cash-box convulsively. Listened. The sound was from upstairs. Old Mystery was still at work, for he heard the door close, though Scrimshaw's receding footsteps had sounded half an hour before.

What was the old man up to? There was some secret on the board betwixt him and the governor, perhaps, Springle charitably reasoned, some fraud or plant, public or private, and possibly connected with the governor's recent blossoming from a thriving man into a Crœsus.

If such a secret existed, the possession of it might lead to the repletion of that emptied cash-box. And Horace Springle, quietly slipping off his stool, stealthily glided through the corridors of the big office on the ground floor, crept upstairs past the offices of the Trust on the first floor, and so on tiptoe up the stairs towards Old Mystery's den.

Then he stooped, peered through the keyhole. There the old man sat, all alone, sorting and counting sheaves and piles of papers—papers which Springle, with indrawn breath, recognised as bank-notes, cheques, and bonds—heaps of

(*Continued overleaf.*)

Bovril's New Gravure.

"The Leopard Skin."

From the Painting, by I. SNOWMAN, at the Royal Academy, 1903.

(The above rough sketch necessarily gives but a poor idea of the beauty of the gravure.)

For particulars how to get one of these handsome pictures (size 29 by 18½ inches, besides mount), free,

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them! Why, there was a fortune on that table.

The old man's back was towards him. He turned the handle of the door, pushed it ajar, peered into that room, bare of aught, except the accessories to the game of finance. Two thousand—three thousand—the old man was counting under his breath. Yes, ten—twenty—fifty—sixty thousand in clean, crisp notes of Mammon's high temple—the Bank of England! It made Springle's eyes blaze and his mouth water; it made his heart leap to see such wealth so near.

So near—so near! Yes, made it leap with a wild, dangerous impulse, born of that thought; it was so near.

The Snare of Gold was working hard, its tentacles were on the soul of this weak nature, and, weak as he was, those toils infused in him, like some magic magnet, an artificial strength, and nerved the coward fibre of his heart.

Hunger had him by the throat—the hunger of Greed, which has spelt murder in all ages since time immemorial:

He looked about him for a weapon. His eyes lit on a heavy office ruler just beyond one of those heaps of notes. He made a spring for it, the old man sprang up with a deep gasp of apprehension. The young one had his weapon and threw himself upon him, aimed a heavy blow at the silver head, numbed the forearm guarding it.

"Help! Help! You young murderer! You coward!"

Old Mystery seized the weapon of his adversary in a strenuous grasp. Old as he was, he was well knit and strong, had been an athlete in his early days, and the young one was hard put to it. But, besides his youth, he had two hands to struggle with, whereas one of Old Mystery's hung useless at his side; and as they wrestled and writhed, overturning chairs, stools, and table, the old man's breath came and went in deep, spasmodic gasps. A sudden turn, a slip, and he was down, with one relentless hand clenched at his throat, the other raised aloft.

"Mercy!" gasped the old man. "Take the money, leave me my life."

A moment his assailant hesitated; perhaps the white hair unnerved him, for he lowered that menacing hand. But then swift the thought of his own danger flashed across his brain.

"I'll make sure," he said, and poised his weapon for the murderous blow.

And suddenly the door was flung wide open and a man burst into the room and threw himself upon the would-be murderer. Only just in time. He gripped that uplifted wrist, and in another few seconds Old Mystery, breathless and dishevelled, was scrambling up.

Springle himself was cowering in a heap, his weapon wrenched from his grasp, the new-comer shaking him by the collar as a dog might shake a rat, meanwhile demanding: "What's this? It seems to me I'm only just in time!"

And Old Mystery, peering into his face, exclaimed: "Why, it's Fred Stanyer."

"Yes," said the other. "I thought I'd give you a surprise. By the Lord Harry, you've given me one. What was this scallywag's game? Robbery as well as murder?" And glancing at the table piled with notes, and opening his eyes as they caught the big figures, he exclaimed: "It seems he wasn't playing for nuts. But, I say, where does it all come from? It looks as if while I've been trafficking in wool down under you've been shearing the Golden Fleece."

"I'll tell you later," said Old Mystery. "Meantime, what's best to be done with this—thing?"

"That's what I was wondering," said Stanyer. "I suppose the proper course is to hand him to the policeman, eh?" And, spurning the "thing" with his foot, "What's to be done with you?"

"I don't know—I don't care!" answered the culprit sullenly, despairingly. "I was driven to it; it's prison for me any way, on another charge, if not on this. It was because I saw a way out of that, because the sight of the money turned my brain, that I did what I did. Do what you like with me, only make short work of it."

"It was the sight of it." Old Mystery, looking on the abject, pulseless creature, reflected how much misery besides this wretched existence the sight of wealth within reach was responsible for, and he thought of his own boys, almost of this fellow's age, and remembered how the glitter of gold had blinded one of those, his elder and his hope.

A something strange at his heart, a whisper in the ear of conscience, impelled him to stride across to where the hopeless lad lay crouched with the shadow of despair enveloping him.

"Sit up! Stand up!" he said. "So you were going to rob me, even murder me, to prevent it being found out that you'd robbed others. How much are you to the bad?"

"From beginning to end—two—hundred—pounds," said Springle, giving the words the weight the man he addressed would not have vouchsafed to thousands. "But, after all, there are only two sides to the pale of solvency, and he who is an inch beyond it is on the same side as the man a mile across."

Without a word Old Mystery took up three notes for a hundred pounds, fiddled with them in his fingers for a while; then, extending them towards the wondering Springle, said:

"There, if you've told the truth, and somehow for once I think you have, this will clear you, this will give you a fresh start. From the fresh start try to run straight, try to be a man."

Springle gazed at the notes lying in his hands. The Open Sesame to Freedom's door, the keys to Heaven almost it seemed. He tried to speak, but his voice broke in a sob, and, burying his head in his arms, he staggered out of Old Mystery's den, leaving that individual and the man from "down under" to exchange reports and explanations.

TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Crime Discovered.

The constable patrolling Lincoln's Inn Fields, turning the bend by the little fountain, observed a huddled-up Something lying across the pavement by the railings in the shadow of the trees.

Instinctively exclaiming, "Hullo, here! What are you doing?" he turned the flash of his lantern on to the huddled heap. Then he caught sight of a hand and the glitter of a bracelet at the wrist.

Stooping, he grasped and flung back the fold of a cloak, noticing how moist it was with the mist, not dreaming for the moment of aught else—till, the fold flung back, he looked with horror into a white, distorted face, a pair of glassy eyes, and, letting go the cloak, touched the cheek to find it stone cold—and then it was that upon his own hand told him that the cloak was moist with something else than mist.

"My God! There's been murder here!" he exclaimed. Then sharp, shrill, and clear, his whistle rang out, waking the silence of the precincts of the law.

Soon footsteps came along at a run from the right, from the left.

"What is it, mate?" shouted other constables, breathing deep.

"Something bad. Send for the ambulance, and is there a doctor near?"

"I am a doctor," said a sharp, quick voice, approaching. Dr. Macquoich, on his way from Lincoln's Inn Hall, where he had been dining with the Chancery Bar, pushed his way through the little knot which had already gathered by that magic which brings a crowd to any spot in the Metropolis at any hour, however deserted previously. "What is the matter?"

"It seems, sir, that something very terrible is the matter. She's been stabbed desperately, brutally, and I think more than once."

Macquoich knelt beside that pale, unconscious form

(*Continued on page 478.*)

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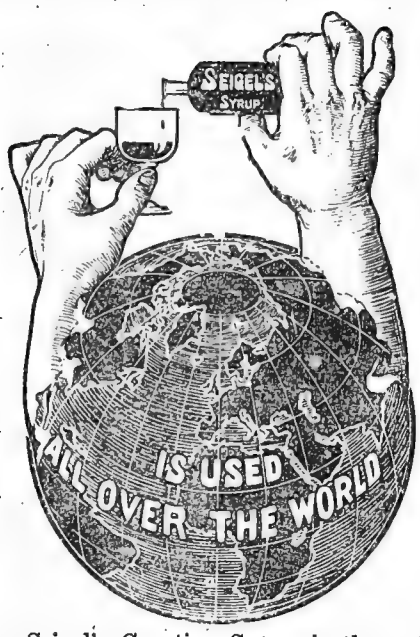
Indigestion means torturing pain, incessant weariness, wretched days, and wakeful nights. It means being "done up," "played out," "bowled over," "good-for-nothing" all the day and every day. It means starved blood, starved muscles, a starved body, and a starved brain—in short, it means shattered health and a broken constitution unless you root it out without delay.



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INDIGESTION.

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supported in the sergeant's arms, placed his ear to the breast, then, by the bull's-eye flash, peered intently into the marble face.

"She is dead, stone dead!" he gasped. Then his voice broke into a terrified cry as he exclaimed:

"My God, it's Clare Armitage!" And a thrill convulsed him, and his face, too, went ghastly white as he thus recognised and named her who was to have been his colleague in the sin which, though only of intent, still rested like a cloud upon his soul.

Just then the ambulance arrived and, followed by a straggling and increasing throng of the morbid and the curious, they bore that which had been Clare Armitage to the mortuary.

And the next morning's papers and the placards of next morning's papers bore in big red letters one gruesome line:

TERRIBLE MURDER!

And beneath it:

WOMAN STABBED IN LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS!

Eric Geldart, having exhausted the pile of letters beside his breakfast tray, glanced at the morning paper, read carefully the report of his last night's speech, reviled the Gallery Man, who had omitted "laughter" after Eric's smartest point and concluded his account with "hear, hear" instead of "loud cheering," scanned the Stock Exchange and Money Market columns, noting with an oath that the Kenilworths had slumped again, and then let his eye rove over the sheets in quest of that which he knew was there, but dreaded to find.

Ah! there it was!

GHASTLY DISCOVERY IN LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS!

A Woman Stabbed to Death.

Clue to the Assassin!

He flinched and trembled, the paper in his hand shaking like an aspen. Then he arose, went to the sideboard and mixed himself a stiffish brandy peg, and, returning to his arm-chair, he read on to the end the account of the finding of the body of a young lady identified as Miss Clare Armitage, of Belsize Gardens, together with this significant paragraph:

The police are, naturally, at this stage reticent as to the existence of a clue, but it is credibly asserted that they found in the dress-pocket of the dead lady a letter relating to the appointment she had evidently been keeping, and an important arrest is imminently expected.

A letter! Eric in all things putting self first bethought himself. Could it have been in his own writing? Then almost as swiftly he reflected with self-congratulation that he had not written her a line almost for years, had indeed been careful not to do so. And then, the appointment of last night—why, the letter fixing that was in his brother Ronald's hand, his own brother's!

Swiftly for a moment flashed across his brain the memory of earlier, happier days when as children they had played together, prayed together at their mother's knee, and callous as this man was, his heart twitched with a something like remorse.

But there was one whose interests silenced those of any other, whose needs outclamoured the necessities, the claims, the rights of all the world besides, one life was dearer than all the other lives that God had given—his own self stood between his own mind, soul, and the light, shrouding that soul in darkness.

Better even that his own brother should be suspected of this as of another crime, should be arrested, even go forth to the scaffold than that shame or even suspicion should rest upon his name or that one barrier should stretch between him and his goal!

He touched a bell, his secretary entered.

"Note these appointments in my diary," he said, pointing to certain of the letters he flung towards him.

The man nodded.

"By the bye," he said, "this request from Lord Maxmore to support him and address the meeting of the Society for the Propagation and Encouragement of High Ideals clashes with Lady Alastair's At Home."

"Oh, yes," replied the M.P., "ah, well, Society before societies, I'll go to Lady Alastair's."

And to Lady Alastair's that night he went. Not that he was particularly partial to her gatherings, because they consisted of clever rather than influential people, but Madeleine was to be there, and then and there he meant to gain her answer.

Since that encounter by the river at Taplow he had only met her once or twice, and then only for a few minutes, tantalising moments, for she had been so strangely cold.

And it was dawning on him that she was far from grateful for his denunciation of his brother, piqued with Ronald for what she might have deemed his deception, and momentarily shocked by learning of his identity with one upon whose name there rested the shadow of suspicion, as she might have been.

But Eric that night, when by her side he walked back with her to Lady Harwardine's, had noted with disquiet the heavings of her breast, the pain that twitched the perfect rosebud of her mouth, and the tears that glistened beneath the lashes of her eyes, the eyes that were "sometimes grey and sometimes blue" like the glistening dews of violets. Perhaps at the moment she had been angrier with Ronald than with him, but women are sometimes angriest with those whom they love best.

Therefore that night Lord Maxmore read amongst other letters of excuse and regret one from Eric Geldart, Esquire, M.P., regretting that the strain of public duties precluded his experiencing the deep gratification of attending the meeting of that society whose objects were so dear to his heart, and Lady Alastair, standing at the head of the staircase, felt honoured to see the brilliant young member for Little Claverton, for Lady Alastair was a very correct woman, with religious leanings, and all religious people look reverently towards the East—where the sun rises.

Many men and women, abler and older than Eric Geldart, would have been infinitely more gratified than he at being received with cordiality so marked in that house. Many, indeed, would have given much to have crossed its threshold, since to have done so was a passport to High Bohemia, for there were gathered the *élite* of the arts and sciences; the rabble of the "going to do" and the "expecteds" thronged elsewhere, harbouring the hope of reaching this Mecca at the end of a later pilgrimage, when the feet should be more hardened and the peas crushed into dust.

He entered the big drawing-room just on the moment of the hush preceding the ballad of the season rendered by a prima-donna of the halls of James and Albert.

He looked round in quest of Madeleine. There she was listening with heart as well as ears to the tender harmonies of voice and piano, for it was the composer himself who caressed the keyboard in accompaniment to the voice of gold. But there were fifty people whom Eric reviled, seated between him and the girl whom he watched with as rapt a gaze as she watched the singer.

And when the song was over he made his way in her direction. But many of the company rose and surged between them, and when he reached where she had sat she was no longer there.

For this was what had happened. At the close of the song Lady Alastair, touching Madeleine's elbow with her fan, had whispered, "Come with me, dear, I want so much to introduce you to a favourite of mine." And so the hostess led the fairest of her guests into another room of the spacious suite, then exclaiming: "Oh, here he is!" added, "Madeleine dear—Mr. Harvey Bligh."

Then, noting the rose flush that came and went and the undulation of the snow white bosom, it dawned on Lady Alastair that her introduction had been superfluous, but noting the gleam in the young author's eyes she guessed it was far from unwelcome.

(Another long instalment next week.)

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19/6 Genuine Italian Mandoline, by Stridente, Naples; fine tone; 21 ribbed, real rosewood, pearl and tortoiseshell inlaid, in saddler-made case; approval.

8/9 Feather Boas; bankrupt stock; special bargains; real Ostrich Feather Boas, beautifully curly; perfectly new, in box; colours: grey and white, black and white, and natural.

10/6 Lustrous diamond and ruby Half-hoop Ring, set with 5 matchless doublet rubies and 8 real diamonds; solid gold, hall-marked.

7/6 Curb Chain Bracelet, with paddock and safety chain; 18-carat, rolled gold (stamped and guaranteed), in velvet case.

6/9 Brooch; very handsome 18-carat rolled gold, 3 swallows in flight; set lovely turquoise and pearls in case.

21/- Lady's solid gold Keyless Watch, jewelled in 10 rubies, beautifully engraved case, splendid time-keeper; 10 years' written warranty; week's free trial.

8/6 Fashionable Long Neck-chain; genuine 18-carat rolled gold (stamped), beautifully finished; very choice design.

9/6 Organ Toned Melodeon; magnificent 26/- instrument. 12-fold bellows (metal bound), 3 sets steel bronze reeds, and 4 acting stops, including Tremolo and Diapason action; rich powerful tone, perfect order.

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12/6 Magnificent 5-row Pearl Collarette; finest quality, mounted with four bars of lustrous Orient diamonds, in velvet-lined case.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Lending Money to a Lover.

"My sweetheart is in money difficulties," writes "STELLA." "Through no fault of his some accounts got wrong at his office, and he has to make up the loss. He has no savings of his own, but I have several pounds in the bank. Would you advise me to offer them to him as a loan?"

* * * * *

If you think he is in serious difficulty, it would be a kind action on your part to offer the money. I suppose he would not borrow it from you unless he were quite confident of being able to repay you fully.

A Friend Not in Need.

"T. L. R." writes: "A girl friend of mine is engaged to a man whom I know gives way to certain bad habits, such as drinking and betting. I do not think she suspects it at all. Would it be my duty to warn her?"

* * * * *

I cannot encourage you to sow discord between the girl and her sweetheart. For all you know, the bad habits may quite disappear when the man finds himself mated to the one he loves. Single men's characters are not always free from blemish, but on marriage a great improvement often takes place. Certainly the girl ought to know everything really important about her husband's character, but it is not the business of a third party to circulate cruel reports. Lovers must be expected to find out each others' virtues and faults from their own observations of each other.

A Lukewarm Lover.

"FREDDIE" writes me a sarcastic letter, which, however, is not without interest. "Is there such a thing as love?" he asks. "I have been engaged five times, and have been very intimate with girls indeed, but in no case has it lasted more than three months, as I have either found the girls flirting with other fellows, or else I have found some other reason for disliking them. Perhaps I have never been in love, but if so, how am I to know when I am? Anyway, I should like to hear from you if a girl can be absolutely in love?"

* * * * *

I imagine you are the kind of man a girl looks upon as something to be trifled with. You admit you have never been sure as to your own feelings. Well, girls have great intuition. I suspect that, after a few weeks in your society, they have seen how the wind blows—that you care very little for them, and when another young man has turned up, have quite willingly fallen to his fascinations. Girls, of course, can love a fellow absolutely, but they generally like some kind of definite return from the other side. A lukewarm lover is generally unpopular, and often gets severely trifled with by the opposite sex.

A Worrying Husband.

"WHEN my husband comes home at night he is often in a very depressed mood. He complains of business worries and bad prospects. When I say I am sorry he seems irritated, and tells me that sympathy is no use. How should I act under such circumstances?"

* * * * *

He may pretend that your sympathy is no use, but in his heart I do not doubt he is very pleased to have it. It is always the lot of the sympathiser to imagine one's efforts apparently useless. But it is not generally justified. You might, though, add to your sympathy a little practical advice. When a man is baffled, I find that he usually prefers even bad advice to none at all.

A Silly Separation.

"MY friend and I had two young ladies," writes "R. S." "We had been going out with them one Sunday, when my young lady said something which my friend did not like. He spoke sharply to her in reply, and my young lady then refused to go out with me any more. The other girl threw my friend up for the same reason. Don't you think it was very wrong of them?"

* * * * *

Yes, it seems a little sudden. I do not think either can have been very fond of you and your friend, or they would not allow such a stupid thing to cause a separation. Perhaps you are best rid of such an attachment. A girl who would throw up a fellow because someone else had offended her must be rather a peppery young person, and decidedly fickle.

How to Leave a Party.

No, "EVA," on leaving a private party where there are a great many guests, it is not necessary to shake hands with each and every acquaintance. If you just give a parting smile, and bow to those you know best, and shake hands with your hostess, you have done all that is expected of you. When leaving a party before proceedings are over, it is usual to retire as quietly as possible.

Too Much Good Nature.

"WHAT am I to do?" writes "BEATRICE." "I am in an awkward position simply as a result of good nature. Some time ago a rather depressing, gloomy young man made love to me. At first I thought him rather interesting, though very full of trouble. Out of good nature I allowed him to visit me often, and offered him advice in his grievances. Then, to my surprise, he protested that I was the only woman he ever loved. He said that if I did not return it, he would make away with himself. Now I had not got it in me to tell him outright that I did not love him, especially as he might really mean what he said. So I said simply that I was very fond of him. This was true in a way, for I did rather like him. Some months have passed, and he now talks as though we were to be married. I have no such intention, as there are others of whom I am much fonder. What had I better do?"

* * * * *

You have got yourself into a difficult position, "BEATRICE," and no doubt from very well-meant motives. It would have been better had you avoided from the first giving him the impression that you were unduly fond of him. To break the connection will be exceedingly difficult. It would be a good plan if you could go away for awhile, and try and cool relations off. It would be better that the parting should be gradual, seeing that you have a morbid person to deal with. After your return, try and treat him only on the basis of a friend, and avoid all intimate conversation and meetings.

Cynthia

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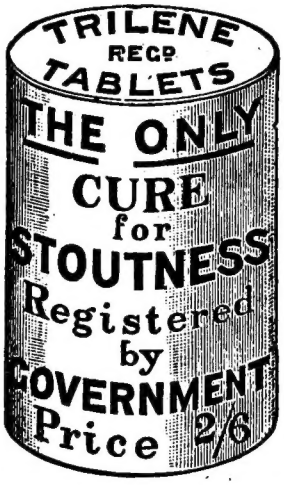

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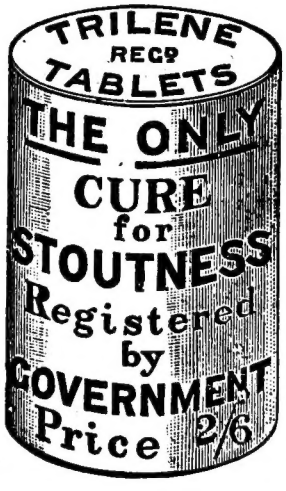

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."
"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Liatorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagilit, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st. and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

Indigestion

FLATULENCE,
AND CONSTIPATION COMPLETELY CURED.

"I DO not think there is a woman in the country who has suffered more from indigestion and biliousness than I have," said Mrs. Bird, of 26 Sun Street, Rugby, in the course of an interview with a "Midland Times" reporter. "Added to these were flatulency and constipation, and so ill was I that even such light food as bread and butter caused me most intense suffering. It was impossible for me to obtain rest, for the pain was so great that I spent many sleepless nights. I tried all sorts of remedies, which did me no good whatever, and a local doctor, after examining me and prescribing his own medicines without any result, admitted he could do nothing for me. I had by this time often heard of Bile Beans, but never tried them. One day a pamphlet came into the house, and, reading of the cures of cases like mine, I was induced to send for a box. Most wonderful to me was the fact that I soon experienced some relief, and, continuing to take the medicine regularly, I found myself, in the course of a few weeks, completely cured. The pains grew less and less severe. I had no more sleepless nights. I found I could practically eat any kind of food. Of course, this result was brought about entirely by Bile Beans, and I can most conscientiously recommend them to everyone who suffers as I did. I always keep a box in the house, and tell everyone interested of the wonderful efficacy of the Beans." Mrs. Bird's sister, who was present at the interview, added her testimony, and said that she believed Bile Beans had saved her sister's life. In fact, they had completely changed her. At the conclusion of the interview Mrs. Bird remarked: "I hope you will publish this interview, and thus be the means of helping other sufferers to learn how they may regain their health."

Examined by a doctor.

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The above cure of Mrs. Bird is no isolated instance, but only one of the many thousands of cases where perseverance with Bile Beans has resulted in the sufferer being permanently relieved, and the Proprietors of Bile Beans will forward a Sample Box Free and a Book on Liver and Digestive Ailments, if you send the accompanying coupon, your name and address, and 1d. stamp (to cover return postage), to BILE BEAN CO., GREEK STREET, LEEDS.

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